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Dana Heupel



Righteous talk after Blagojevich's arrest leads nowhere

by Dana Heupel

If not now, when?

It seemed — for a short while, at

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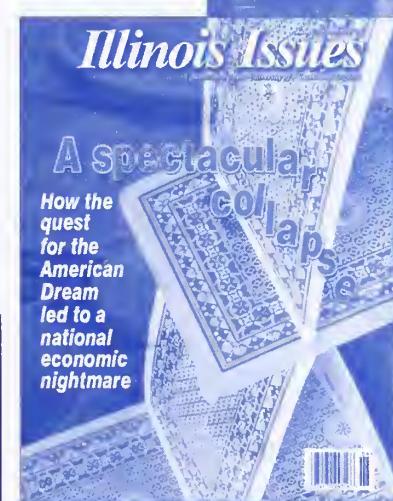
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Dana Heupel



Righteous talk after Blagojevich's arrest leads nowhere

by Dana Heupel

If not now, when?

The answer: Never.

With one former governor under indictment for allegedly auctioning off state government for campaign contributions, another in prison for shaking down state employees for campaign cash, and a United States senator who may have tried to barter for his appointment by offering to raise campaign money for the governor who would select him, if Illinois couldn't enact meaningful campaign finance reform this year, it never will.

And it couldn't.

Sure, there was a lot of righteous talk after then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich was arrested.

"I look forward to working with Republican and Democratic lawmakers alike in the next session to strengthen our ethics laws and put an end to 'pay-to-play' politics," Republican Sen. Dale Righter stated after Blagojevich's arrest in early December.

"It's our duty to clean up the mess and stop the freak show that's become Illinois government," Democratic Rep. Jack Franks said immediately before the House vote on impeachment later that month.

It seemed — for a short while, at least — that the air in the Capitol was fragrant with the spirit of government ethics. But ... Rep. Bill Black sensed what the end product would be.

"We're going to start to fumigate state government from top to bottom to make sure it has no corruption," Gov. Pat Quinn pledged in January on his second day in office.

"You want desperately just to climb out of this hole, this ethics garbage dump we have," House Republican Leader Tom Cross told the *New York Times* after Blagojevich's indictment in April.

"I think it's very, very important that we the people confront this crisis, enact the reforms that will solve the problems and make sure they never happen again," Quinn said after the indictment.

It seemed — for a short while, at least — that the air in the Capitol was fragrant with the spirit of government ethics. But always-quotable Republican Rep. Bill Black sensed what the end product would be midway through the process, when he declared: "Ladies and gentlemen, the smell of reform ... or wait a minute. Maybe it's the smell of reform decomposing."

At least in the area of campaign finance — the single unifying thread that knits together ethics allegations against Blagojevich, former Gov. George Ryan and U.S. Sen. Roland Burris — what emerged from the legislature wasn't reform; it was refusal.

Thumps could be heard for miles as supporters of **House Bill 7** in both legislative chambers — all of whom were Democrats — patted themselves on the back for passing what they crowed was the state's first-ever limits on campaign contributions. But the supposed restrictions aren't limits; they're simply license to continue the same pay-to-play practices that have stained Illinois government for decades.

"'Better than nothing' doesn't sit very well with the voters at home,"

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Democratic Rep. Kathleen Ryg said after her “present” vote in the House.

“This is the height of perverted government in the guise of reform,” said Republican Sen. Dan Cronin when **HB 7** passed that chamber. “Aren’t we ethical people trying to fumigate government when it’s really about gaining more power?”

And that’s exactly what **HB 7** does. It maintains — and arguably enhances — the already entrenched fundraising power of incumbents and House and Senate leaders.

To Quinn’s credit, immediately after he took office, he created the Illinois Reform Commission to advise him and legislators on ways to clear the air of the corruption that permeates state government. After eight public hearings and seven town hall meetings, the commission issued its report. Among many other recommendations, it urged that Illinois campaign contribution limits should be patterned after those enforced in federal elections: For each election — primary and general — donations to a candidate could not exceed \$2,400 from individuals; \$5,000 from corporations, labor unions or political action committees; and \$30,000 from legislative leaders’ PACs.

HB 7 blasts those caps sky-high: Each year, contributions would be limited to \$5,000 from individuals; \$10,000 from corporations, unions and associations; and \$90,000 from transfers between political committees. It places no restrictions on “in-kind contributions,” such as paying for advertisements for a candidate, recruiting campaign workers and sending out mailers.

Many wise and experienced Statehouse watchers believe that caps on campaign contributions won’t eliminate the corrupting influence of money in politics. Ann Lousin, a distinguished professor at John Marshall Law School and longtime friend and supporter of *Illinois Issues*, argued in a letter to the editor published in March that more visible disclosure requirements, which she termed “sunshine,” are a much better solution because no matter how tough the legal restrictions, creative, crooked

politicians will find a way around them, and limits would eventually be eroded by inflation. Our columnist Charles N. Wheeler III, who covered the Statehouse for many years for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and now mentors prospective journalists at the University of Illinois at Springfield, reaches a similar conclusion elsewhere in this month’s issue.

They may well be correct. Nearly two decades of closely observing Illinois politicians in action has only heightened my awe of the ability of some of them to construct imaginative schemes to skirt the law. But in response, even if I know that installing a lock on my front door won’t keep out criminals who really want to burglarize my house, I figure it just might slow them down a bit.

Strictly limiting campaign contributions is at least an attempt — even if only symbolic — to combat the fact that for years, pay-to-play has been the ticket for entry into Illinois’ public policy arena. **HB 7** doesn’t even go that far. It’s what happens when those who reap the benefits from a shady system are the only ones who can change it: a cynical move to expand fundraising clout instead of a sincere effort to try to restrain it.

Rejecting his own advisory commission’s recommendations, and against the advice of other reform groups, Quinn — whose political chops rely on his reputation as a maverick — testified at the Capitol in support of **HB 7**. “I think this is the best we can do at this time,” he told the Senate Executive Committee.

Rest assured that the word “incremental” was bandied about freely during closed-door negotiations on the bill. It’s been uttered for years by those at the Capitol who want to stall real campaign-finance reform or who seek to justify less-than-adequate results. But regarding the General Assembly’s accomplishments toward that end during the recent legislative session, the more apt term would be “insincere.”

Dana Heupel can be reached at heupel.dana@uis.edu.

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Credits: The issue was designed by Lindsey Feger. The photograph on our cover comes to us courtesy of Horizon Wind Energy.

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Bethany Jaeger



The public's right to know should apply to water safety, too

by Bethany Jaeger

Tricia Krause asked Crestwood residents to tie color-coded ribbons around their trees to demonstrate the village's "epidemiological cancer map."

"And, therefore, it would show the significance of how many people are sick in the village — because there are so many," she says.

Two cases include her own children. Her son was diagnosed with childhood leukemia at age 3. Her daughter developed a rare brain tumor at age 5. Her babysitter also developed a brain tumor. Now ages 19 and 15, Krause's children technically are cancer-free, but they've been ill with deficient autoimmune systems their whole lives.

Krause lived in Crestwood, a Cook County village with about 11,250 people, from 1987 to 1996. In that decade, local officials allegedly routinely turned a valve to let water flow from a contaminated well into the public water supply as a way to save money, all while lying to authorities that the well was only used as an emergency backup water source.

The string of chronic illnesses kindled her suspicions. She started investigating in 1999. After 10 years of asking questions, she tipped off the Illinois attorney general's office and the *Chicago Tribune*. Both reported this spring that three village officials tapped into the contaminated well for at least 22 years.

Attorney General Lisa Madigan filed a civil lawsuit in Cook County. The U.S.

Whether public officials hid that they knowingly pumped contaminated water into the public supply is scary.

Whether state law fails to mandate that officials warn consumers is just as alarming.

Environmental Protection Agency issued a search warrant in an ongoing criminal investigation. U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush involved the federal Justice Department, while U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin asked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to look into whether drinking the water could have contributed to various illnesses. A CDC official reportedly said at a public meeting in Crestwood that there were no elevated levels of cancer but that the investigation is just in the beginning stages.

Nevertheless, the allegations raise alarming questions about whether those who lived and worked in 3,000 homes and 600 businesses that received water from Crestwood's public supply were in danger of consuming cancer-causing agents called volatile organic compounds but didn't know it.

Whether public officials hid that they knowingly pumped contaminated water

into the public supply is scary. Whether state law fails to mandate that officials warn consumers is just as alarming.

Current law requires the Illinois EPA to notify owners of public water systems when samples reveal traces of harmful chemicals in groundwater or drinking water. Local officials are responsible for notifying their consumers.

Crestwood officials allegedly found a gap in the law.

According to the attorney general's complaint filed last month, three officials — former Crestwood Mayor Chester Stanczek, his son and current Mayor Robert Stanczek and the former water supply operator, Frank Scaccia — lied on state forms and public reports for more than two decades. Village reports show that it purchased Lake Michigan water from neighboring Alsip and that the public water supply was 100 percent Lake Michigan water.

The well, which was known to contain volatile organic chemicals since 1985, wasn't used as a backup, as reported from 1985 to September 2007. The average amount of well water mixed into the Lake Michigan supply ranged from a high of 20 percent in 1991 to a low of 2 percent in 2006.

Because village officials reported that the well served only as an emergency backup, it wasn't required to be tested. And the state relies on an honor system for such reporting.

“There was no federal requirement. They knew what they were doing,” says Rick Cobb, deputy manager of the state EPA’s Division of Public Water Supply.

It wasn’t until 2004 that the Illinois EPA started testing backup wells on a quarterly basis as part of a larger effort to study the quality of groundwater throughout the state, according to Cobb.

The department detected vinyl chloride in Crestwood’s well in September 2007.

Less than two months later, Crestwood maintained that it still did not draw water from the well, according to the complaint.

The story changed on August 21, 2008, when Scaccia, the former water supply operator, told officials that the village did, indeed, supplement Lake Michigan water with well water, according to the lawsuit.

Scaccia’s attorney, Bill Seith of Total Environmental Solutions in Oakbrook Terrace, says his client “is certainly very interested in making sure that everybody is properly informed.”

The village published a statement on its Web site declaring the attorney general’s lawsuit and fines “unnecessary” because the village stopped using the well in September 2007 and abandoned it in March. The mayor also issued a statement after media stories broke and said the well water was treated with chlorine and was only tapped during times of high demand.

“There is no evidence that the drinking water that flowed from our kitchen taps contained any substances inconsistent with what the law allows. Lake Michigan water has continued to be the source for at least 90 percent of the water supply.”

In a phone interview the day the attorney general’s office filed the complaint, Madigan said, “You can add up 122 times that the village and its public officials misrepresented or withheld information from the public and IEPA that was required under the law.”

She added that the lawsuit wasn’t just to penalize the Crestwood officials — although her suit seeks up to tens of millions of dollars in fines to cover each day the violation occurred — but it also is meant to send a message to water supply operators throughout the state that they will be held accountable for following environmental and health safety laws.

“The idea that people and their children were drinking water contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals for their whole

Approved by the General Assembly in May, HB 4021 would require more immediate and direct notification to the public if the EPA detected a threat of contaminated water.

lifetimes is terrifying,” she says. “I mean, they’re drinking the water. You’re brushing your teeth in the water. You’re cooking food in the water. You’re showering, bathing in the water. It’s just terrifying.”

The U.S. EPA qualifies vinyl chloride as a carcinogen related to dry cleaning solvents. Short-term exposure can damage the central nervous system. Long-term exposure can lead to cancer and liver damage.

Krause, the mother-turned-investigator and, now, advocate for public access to information, says she moved to nearby Orland Park, but she continues to investigate Crestwood.

“Because I shed the light on this, I feel as though I have a large responsibility to tell the truth to citizens and still investigate on a daily basis. We only have one shot to make sure that the criminal investigation uncovers any new clues or findings and consistently researches any new developments.”

She’s also seeking more answers from the Illinois EPA.

“I’m tired of excuses. ‘Well, we didn’t have enough manpower. We didn’t have any money in our budgets.’ We’re talking about people’s health and lives and futures and children and babies. This is ridiculous that they were poisoning us and literally killing us and getting away with it.”

Illinois EPA spokeswoman Maggie Carson says she cannot say whether manpower prevented the agency from testing backup wells until 2004.

“As we learn more and our technology becomes more sophisticated, our understanding of the health effects become more apparent; we realize we need ever more information.”

She says the Illinois EPA is looking at whether the agency needs to revise various processes, but she defends its management of the Crestwood situation.

“From the Illinois EPA’s perspective, we believe we did everything right. Could we do more? We could always do more. The public notification is something that we are continuing to build upon.”

Whether more could have been done to notify the public immediately after the September 2007 test results is still up for discussion, Carson says. Technical staff believe they took the appropriate steps to confirm the information before sharing it publicly.

“And we do take a scientific approach to this. We don’t want to unduly alarm people by putting out information that may have no value or may not even be accurate.”

The agency did help draft legislation that was on the governor’s desk at press time. Approved by the General Assembly in May, **House Bill 4021** would require more immediate and direct notification to the public if the EPA detected a threat of contaminated water.

For instance, if the state agency found a concentration of chemicals that exceeded groundwater standards, it would have to post all information online. Local officials would have to issue the same information and describe the potential health effects within two days, as opposed to the current 60 days allowed after a violation or a seal order is issued. They could distribute the information through phone calls, post cards, text messages or e-mails. And they would have to follow up with a written notice in customers’ bills.

Officials who knowingly lied to the state or federal EPA would be charged with a felony, in the hope that a more significant punishment would deter future crimes, Cobb says.

“We didn’t anticipate that all of the safety factors that we have in place for community supplies wouldn’t catch something like Crestwood. But obviously there was a gap. So this is intended to fill that gap.”

Krause says community members still need to be their own watchdogs. “And don’t give up. Because I didn’t, and we have answers, unfortunately.”

But it shouldn’t require a mother to conduct a 10-year investigation to get those answers. □

Bethany Jaeger can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

REFORM MONITOR

Effort to revamp state government focuses on executive powers

Photograph by Bethany Jaeger



Gov. Pat Quinn and House Speaker Michael Madigan present to a House committee legislation that would cap the amount individuals, businesses and political committees could donate to candidates.

Six months after the arrest of former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, the Illinois General Assembly approved a series of reforms designed — as Democratic Rep. Jack Franks described one measure — to prevent alleged corruption from going on long enough for a federal indictment to intervene again.

Lawmakers reviewed everything from clearing state government of Blagojevich appointees to buying equipment and services from private companies.

Appointed by Gov. Pat Quinn, a panel of Statehouse outsiders called the Illinois Reform Commission also proposed numerous ideas. However, few of its suggestions won legislative approval.

Measures that did pass were designed to prevent the abuse of executive powers. They stopped short of reforming the way the legislature conducts its own business.

Commissioners, led by former federal prosecutor Patrick Collins, said they were open to discussing changes to their recommendations. However, the panel framed its final report as the measuring stick for meaningful change. At times, legislators — particularly Democrats — seemed to distance themselves from the panel and act on some of their own reform initiatives.

Democratic Rep. Lou Lang, an assistant majority leader from Skokie, said the commission's recommendations were "not necessarily the Holy Grail."

At one point during the effort to limit the amount individuals, businesses and interest groups could donate to political campaigns, Quinn testified in favor of the legislature's version, which competed with his own commission's recommendations.

The commission and the legislature did work together on a few issues.

Here is a list of items the commission recommended and how lawmakers responded.

- The commission recommended limiting the amount individuals could donate to political campaigns to \$2,400, while corporations, labor organizations and political committees would be capped at \$5,000. The commission also wanted to limit state party committees to \$50,000 for supporting statewide offices, \$30,000 for General Assembly candidates. The legislature did not go nearly that far with **House Bill 7**. If signed by Quinn, it would set limits at \$5,000 from individuals and \$10,000 from labor unions, corporations and political committees per calendar year. The cap for state party leadership would be \$90,000. However, legislative leadership could give unlimited in-kind contributions such as airtime for advertisements, yard signs or staff.
- The commission recommended banning contributions from lobbyists. **HB 7** would limit lobbyists to contributing up to \$10,000 to a single candidate's campaign committee.
- The commission recommended public financing for judges. **HB 7** would only create a task force to study public financing for judges.
- The commission recommended real-time disclosure of campaign contributions year-round. **HB 7**, however, would only require real-time disclosure during May, the height of the legislative action and budget negotiations. Otherwise, candidates would file campaign contribution reports four times a year.
- The commission recommended holding primary elections in June. The legislature has not debated the measure.
- The commission recommended a new independent state agency to buy services and equipment for the state. The legislature approved **Senate Bill 51**, which wouldn't go that far but would require hiring a series of independent procurement officials in a six-level oversight system. Each appointment would need Senate confirmation. And unlike the current system, the use of subcontractors would have to be disclosed.
- The commission recommended increasing state's attorneys' powers to investigate corruption and creating stronger penalties for corruption charges. A Senate panel rejected those ideas.
- The commission recommended making reports about government corruption public information. Such reports currently are confidential. The General Assembly approved **Senate Bill 54**, which would require inspectors general to make reports public with the power to redact information that would violate the privacy of witnesses or potentially jeopardize ongoing investigations.
- The commission recommended overhauling the way Illinois redraws legislative districts. Legislators have said they plan to debate the issue throughout the summer and possibly during a special session this fall.
- The commission recommended imposing term limits on legislative leaders. The legislature did not debate the issue.
- The commission recommended changing rules so that every bill with at least 16 sponsors in the House or eight sponsors in the Senate would get an up-or-down vote in a committee. The commission's intent was to end leadership's control over which measures advance to floor debate. Republicans urged debate about the measure, while Democratic leadership abstained.

Bethany Jaeger and Jamey Dunn

LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

Lawmakers temporarily adjourned June 1, after approving a bare bones budget that would not fund community services for an entire year. Gov. Pat Quinn opposed the spending plan and called upon legislative leaders to continue negotiating until a "humane" budget could be approved before the new fiscal year starts July 1. Quinn urged the legislature to increase state income taxes, but two different proposals failed to acquire enough votes in May.

Check Illinois Issues Blog — <http://illinoisissuesblog.blogspot.com> — for updates throughout the summer:

Meanwhile, here's a sample of what the General Assembly did advance to the governor's desk, as well as what failed but could come back this fall.

Driving safety

HB 71 Both chambers approved a measure that would make the use of cell phones and other electronic devices to send text messages while driving illegal. Global positioning devices would be exempt, as long as they were only used for getting directions. Law enforcement, emergency vehicle operators and drivers seeking emergency help also would be excluded.

HB 72 A second bill that won approval also would prohibit the use of cell phones in school zones and construction zones. Emergency calls and phones used by construction workers would be excluded from the ban.

Charter schools

SB 612 Twice as many charter schools could soon be able to operate throughout the state. A measure, sponsored by Sen. Kimberly Lightford, a Maywood Democrat, would increase the number of charter schools from 60 to 120, including the creation of five charter schools specifically for high-school students who had previously dropped out. The bill, which passed both chambers, would create a task force to analyze the way Illinois authorizes charter schools.

Public access

HB 35 Anyone with Internet access would be able to view information about state employees, contracts, corporate tax breaks and state spending on a government Web site. The Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal would be created by a bill sponsored by Rep. Michael Tryon, a Crystal Lake Republican, and Sen. Susan Garrett, a Lake Forest Democrat. The measure passed both chambers.

Furlough days

SB 2090 State legislators would have to take four unpaid days off and would not receive their cost-of-living raises for next fiscal year, under a measure that awaits the governor's signature. The measure also would take away the governor's ability to set agency directors' salaries, which would instead be set by the Compensation Review Board.

Recall

HJRCA 31 Voters would be able to decide on the 2010 ballot whether they wanted to change the Illinois Constitution to give them the power to remove a sitting governor from office. The constitutional amendment, proposed by Woodstock Democratic Rep. Jack Franks, advanced through the House but not in the Senate. The Senate must approve the measure by May 2010, six months prior to the next general election, for the question to appear on the 2010 ballot.

Employee "fumigation"

SB 1333 House Speaker Michael Madigan thought Quinn was moving too slowly to review high-level state employees and appointees put in place by former Govs. George Ryan and Rod Blagojevich, both subjects of federal corruption cases. Madigan's bill would have forced Quinn to review up to 750 employees and appointees by the end of the summer to decide if they should stay on board. Anyone not reappointed by Quinn would automatically be fired. The measure won House approval but stalled in the Senate.

Pension benefits

HB 2643, SB 1292 Newly hired state employees and teachers would receive less generous benefits than current workers under a two-tiered pension plan proposed by Quinn as a way to save money in the long-term. Public employee unions vocally opposed the measure and said it would not save money. The measure stalled in both chambers.

New casinos

SB 744 A bill that would greatly expand gaming in Illinois won approval in the Senate but stalled in the House. The proposal by Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat, would allow for new casinos in Chicago, Waukegan, Rockford and Danville to generate about \$1 billion for state coffers. It also would expand the number of slot machines allowed at existing facilities.

Medical marijuana

SB 1381 For the first time in the Illinois General Assembly's history, a bill authorizing the limited use of medical marijuana passed the Senate. The measure, sponsored by two Democrats, Sen. Bill Haine of Alton and Rep. Lou Lang of Skokie, stalled in the House. Lang says he wasn't sure he had the 60 votes needed for it to pass. He says he hopes to present it during the next legislative session.

Civil unions

HB 2234 Two people of either the same or opposite sex would gain legal rights, benefits and obligations as married couples, under a measure sponsored by Rep. Greg Harris, a Chicago Democrat. It would not afford the same state and federal rights as heterosexual married couples, although opponents still say they fear it would open the door for same-sex marriage. The bill stalled in the House.

Jamey Dunn, Hilary Russell, Bethany Jaeger

State budget, services and capital plans left in limbo

Photograph by Hilary Russell



Gov. Pat Quinn addresses the media shortly before the legislature adjourned without having approved a full spending plan.

Legislators left the state Capitol in the early hours of June 1, having approved a bare bones spending plan that they knew wouldn't fund state services for an entire 12 months.

A discouraged Gov. Pat Quinn said he wouldn't sign it. Nor would he sign a \$29 billion capital construction plan intended to spur the economy and build new roads, bridges, schools and other infrastructure projects.

"A partially funded budget is not a budget," Quinn said on May 31 in front of his Statehouse office. "You've got to make sure you have a whole budget for 12 months of the fiscal year."

Quinn's administration projected an \$11.6 billion budget deficit by the end of next fiscal year. To plug a portion of the hole, the governor proposed state income tax increases of 1.5 percentage points for individuals and 2.4 percentage points for corporations.

Republicans remained united against any tax hike, instead favoring budget cuts and Medicaid reforms to save money. Without GOP support, Democrats said they could not drum up enough votes to approve an income tax hike of

any kind, including a two-year temporary increase that would have generated about \$4.5 billion.

Other efforts to generate revenue, including expanding gaming, levying another tax on alcohol and increasing the sales tax on cigarettes, all failed to advance, as well.

Without an agreed way to raise more money, Democratic legislators resorted to the lean budget, also without Republican support. The spending plan would fund state agencies at about half of the level proposed by the governor.

Budget cuts would affect everything from childcare programs for low-income working parents to services for the developmentally disabled and mentally ill, leading many social service providers to warn of devastating and dangerous consequences.

Yet, the deficient spending plan would not result in a balanced budget, either. In fact, Quinn's office projected that it carried a \$9.2 billion deficit. More cuts, including state employee layoffs, were among the options being considered if the legislature did not approve new revenue sources by July 1, the start of the new fiscal year.

As the result of an unbalanced budget, Quinn said he would not enact the major construction program. He said investors wouldn't buy bonds from the state as long as it had "a gaping hole in its operating budget of billions of dollars."

Democratic leadership in both chambers, in turn, used parliamentary maneuvers to prevent the approved operating budget and the approved capital plan from heading to the governor's desk.

Quinn and legislative leaders of both political parties continued to meet throughout June. Because the spring legislative session extended beyond the self-imposed deadline of May 31, any revised budget plan or revenue ideas would need a three-fifths majority to pass. That further challenges the governor's attempt to levy an income tax increase of any kind.

Check Illinois Issues Blog — <http://illinoisisissuesblog.blogspot.com> — for updates throughout the summer.

Bethany Jaeger

Photograph by Bethany Jaeger



Senate President John Cullerton and Minority Leader Christine Radogno address the media after the chamber approved a major portion of the \$29 billion construction program.

Capital plan

If the capital construction plan moves forward, it would be funded by a potpourri of revenue sources.

The bulk of the plan, \$375 million, would come from two gaming sources: legalizing and taxing video poker machines in truck stops, as well as in establishments that serve alcohol; and selling certain lottery games online. The plan also includes hiring a private firm to manage the Illinois Lottery. Both measures, however, hinge on approval from the U.S. Justice Department.

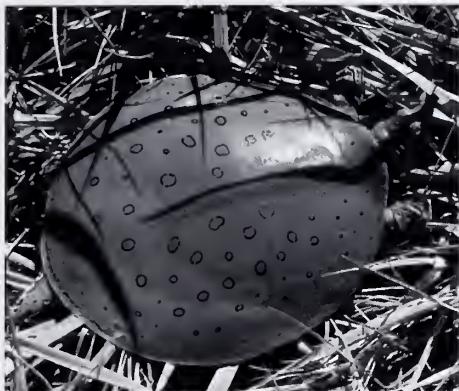
Remaining funding would come from increased fees on license plates, registrations, driver's licenses and some fine increases. They would supply more than \$330 million per year.

Expanding the sales tax to soft drinks, candy, beauty supplies and some hygiene products and increasing the sales tax on beer, wine and spirits would generate up to an additional \$150 million per year.

Jamey Dunn

ENDANGERED Turtle added to list

Photographs by Chris Phillips, courtesy of the Illinois Natural History Survey



Smooth softshell turtle, *Apalone mutica*

The smooth softshell turtle, *Apalone mutica*, likes rivers and large streams that have sand substrate, sandbars and sandy banks. Unfortunately, the state's rivers are filling up with mud, which serves Illinoisans much better as topsoil and robs turtles and other water-loving animals and plants of essential habitat.

In May, the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board added the reptile, which had been unlisted, to the endangered list.

Apalone mutica is one of about 30 turtle

species characterized by a flattened carapace (shell), which lacks the large scales and bony architecture characteristic of most turtles.

The smooth softshell is a medium-size turtle, with the female growing up to 14 inches in length and the male half that size. They have a tan, brown or olive shell with a light cream-colored border. Adult males are usually gray or brown with dots and dashes on the back. Adult females are a much more drab color and have large dark blotches on the carapace. They have paired, dark-bordered, white stripes extending across their snouts to their eyes, with a similar pair of stripes extending from their eyes onto their necks.

Smooth softshells have long necks, streamlined heads and elongated proboscis-like snouts with the nostrils at the tips. By burying in sand or water and extending their heads and necks so that their snouts just break the surface, they can breathe in a snorkel-like manner.

Mainly carnivorous, smooth softshells prefer insects and insect larvae, snails and crayfish. They can actively search for and pursue prey or capture it by ambush. Propelled by all four limbs, which are strongly webbed, softshells are rapid swimmers.

"They require clean, high-quality water flowing over sand," says Chris Phillips, herpetologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and co-author of *The Field Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of Illinois*. "That kind of habitat is prone to disturbance and from flood events. Sandbars can be buried under silt."

Unlike Illinois' other softshell species, the spiny, which is so tolerant "it is almost a weed," says Phillips, the smooth softshell is much more sensitive. Its No. 1 threat is siltation and sedimentation. "There can't be much silt in the water."

He says the smooth softshell was listed as endangered because the technical group advising the board had good data, gathered since the last listing, that shows scientists have found only one breeding population of the species within the state. It's in the Sangamon River. The board agreed the species is in imminent danger of being lost as a breeding species in Illinois.

"If you have just one population in one river, that's not good enough," says Phillips. "You could have some kind of spill or accident, and the Sangamon population could go tomorrow."

Beverley Scobell

Public access laws gain regulatory teeth

All public bodies could be held to much higher standards when withholding documents and other information from the public. Legislation to strengthen the Illinois Freedom of Information Act and the Open Meetings Act won near-unanimous approval by the General Assembly.

If signed by the governor, the changes would take effect January 1, 2010.

Some provisions that sought to improve access to information in the legislative process did not make it into the final version.

Nonetheless, **Senate Bill 189** was a product of compromise among legislators of both political parties, the Illinois Press Association, the Illinois attorney general's office and Gov. Pat Quinn's Illinois Reform Commission.

A representative of the Illinois Municipal League, however, said lawmakers would start to find out soon after the bill became law that it would place a heavy burden on local governments.

One major difference from the current law, which lacks penalties, is that a so-called public access counselor would have the ability to levy fines for noncompliance.

The public access counselor, which is a specialized lawyer, is housed in the Illinois attorney general's office, which would gain significant power by being able to subpoena information. The counselor also would be able to issue binding opinions about whether public bodies, in fact, must release information being requested.

The process also would get faster. Public bodies would have to reply to requests within five business days, as opposed to the current seven. And if a government body denied a request, the public would have to take fewer steps to appeal that denial.

"It used to be request, denial, appeal, denial," says Don Craven, interim executive director of the Illinois Press Association. "Now it's just request, denial, and you're ready to go. So we shortened the process."

Other highlights of the FOIA reforms include the following:

- Courts could impose a fine ranging from \$2,400 to \$5,000 for public bodies that intentionally failed to comply with the FOIA. If a public body waited too long to reply to a request, then it couldn't charge a copying fee or say the information was exempt because the request was "unduly burdensome."
- Courts would be required to award attorneys' fees to individuals or entities who filed a lawsuit to force a government body to release public information. Current law permits courts to do so but does not force them.
- Public bodies could black out confidential information when releasing public records.
- Officials would have a higher standard for proving they have a right to deny requests.
- Public bodies would have to designate specific employees to take training about the FOIA and the Open Meetings Act.

Bethany Jaeger

Dogfighting audiences could get punished if caught



It's a lucrative business, one hidden from public view because of its violent nature, and individuals who take part in it typically go unpunished.

Illinois law already prohibits dogfighting, but a comprehensive bill that won legislative approval this spring would expand that law to punish not only those who run dogfighting rings but those who watch and participate in them.

"Anyone who is attending a dogfight quickly understands that they are participating in an illegal activity, and, as such, they have no right to claim ignorance of the law," says Rep. Marlow Colvin, a Chicago Democrat. "What we did was move to help eradicate a very dangerous and very vicious activity."

House Bill 69 passed both legislative chambers and was sent to the governor

in May for approval.

The bill is designed to punish anyone who participates in dogfighting, including individuals who drive dogs to a fighting or training facility, even if they don't attend the fight. A person also could be arrested for buying, leasing and hauling training equipment intended for dogfighting, if Gov. Pat Quinn signs the measure.

The bill also stipulates that veterinarians could be punished if they treated suspicious wounds and didn't report the animal and its owner to authorities.

Three years ago, in an effort to help curb such activities in Illinois, the Humane Society launched a citywide pilot program in Chicago to teach children who may have been exposed to animal fighting that it is not entertainment but is illegal and inhumane.

Dogfighting made headlines in early 2007, when former National Football League player Michael Vick, a quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons, was convicted and sent to jail for 23 months for hosting dogfighting-training facilities at his Virginia home. Vick recently was released and will serve the remaining two months of his sentence under home confinement.

According to the Humane Society, Vick will volunteer with the organization to learn about the damaging effects of dogfighting, not just to the dogs but to the people involved.

In a typical dogfight, usually pit bull dogs that are trained to kill are pitted against each other until only one is left standing. Spectators often place bets on the fights.

Dogfighting is outlawed in every state and carries felony sentences in 48 states. Under current Illinois law, spectators are subject to misdemeanor violations. Colvin's bill would increase the penalty to a Class 4 felony, which carries a prison sentence of one to three years and a fine of up to \$25,000.

Colvin said his effort to advance the measure had a few hiccups before winning approval. "There was some apprehension about how you could get caught up in a dogfight and not know it," he says. "Or being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time and then getting charged for that, although I tend to think that is more excuse than real evidence."

To combat those concerns, Colvin specified in his bill that only individuals who knowingly attend a fight would be charged.

Hilary Russell



Emiquon blooms

The coreopsis, Indian paintbrush, spiderwort and lupine were all blooming at west central Illinois' Emiquon Preserve in early June.

And Thompson and Flag lakes were so full, thanks to prolific spring precipitation, that they had become contiguous, covering more than 4,300 acres at Emiquon.

That's according to Mike Lemke, who is director of the University of Illinois at Springfield's Emiquon Field Station.

Emiquon is The Nature Conservancy's 7,100 acre preserve on the Illinois River near Havana. Ecologists aim to bring the preserve back from farmland to prairie, bottomland forest and wetlands.

River otter, beaver, muskrats and a wide variety of water fowl have made the preserve home. "The animals have taken advantage of the restored habitat," says Doug Blodgett, who is director of The Nature Conservancy's Illinois River Project.

Among the birds, which numbered 50,000 in a fall aerial count, are rare-for-the-region breeders such as the black-necked stilt, the ruddy duck and the pied-billed grebe.

"Anytime you have rare birds like that showing up at a restoration, we tend to think it's the case that it's providing some function that wasn't there before," says Joshua Stafford, who is the director of the Illinois Natural History Survey's Stephen A. Forbes Biological Station. "The bottom line is there are significant numbers of water fowl using the area."

Other locally or regionally rare birds visiting included northern harriers, black terns, marbled godwits and northern shrikes.

Humans were added to the preserve in April when fishermen — aboard nongasoline-powered boats such as kayaks, canoes or paddleboats — were allowed at the site for the first time, Blodgett says. More than 2,000 permits were distributed through the Dickson Mounds Museum, which is near Emiquon.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney



The wetlands at the Emiquon Preserve



Snow geese at Emiquon



Pelicans

O'Hare expansion for the birds

When O'Hare International Airport in Chicago expanded its runways, the construction destroyed some natural areas. The construction company was required by federal law to do "mitigation" work, which means creating natural space somewhere else. It paid a sizable fine, and one of the winners was Bartel Grassland in Matteson in south suburban Cook County.

The city passed funding to the land preservation division of Openlands (CorLands), a nonprofit dedicated to increasing open space for public enjoyment. The \$4.5 million will restore wetlands and grasslands on approximately 380 acres of the total 635 acres at Bartel managed by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. That funding also allowed the forest preserve district to expand Bartel Grasslands by joining it

to the new Tinley Creek Wetlands Project, growing the contiguous grassland/wetland acres to 860 and total preserve acres to 1,400.

"The forest preserve district applied for funding, and the city gave us the project to administer," says Linda Masters, a restoration ecologist and project manager for CorLands. Partners in the project, in addition to the forest preserve district, are the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Audubon-Chicago Region and Bartel volunteers.

For migrating birds such as sandhill cranes to stay to raise their young, "they need a good, big chunk of land like we have," says Dick Riner, site steward. This spring, a number of sandhill cranes, as well as a rare whooping crane, along with buffleheads, lapland longspurs, pintails, shovanders and blue-

winged teals, visited the new wetland. The grassland birds — bobolinks, meadowlarks, savannah and Henslow's sparrows, which had become threatened due to habitat loss — have come back, also.

Riner, a retired science teacher, coordinates volunteers, who have helped remove unwanted trees and non-native, invasive plants and will take part in restoring the grassland and the wetland with native prairie and water plants.

When the farm tiles that drained the expanded acres were valved and shut off in March, Riner says water returned to the area that "hasn't been wetland for over 100 years." The group will monitor the hydrology during the next year. "The goal is to make it a true wetland, and whatever happens with plants and with animals, including birds, is because it's a wetland."

Beverley Scobell

Photographs by Chris Whelan, courtesy of the Illinois Natural History Survey



Henslow's sparrow



Meadowlark



Bobolink

Updates

- **House Bill 3987**, sponsored by Rep. Julie Hamos of Evanston and Sen. Don Harmon of Oak Park, which would make energy efficient "green building" practices standard for every new home built in Illinois, passed both chambers of the legislature (see *Illinois Issues*, July/August 2008, page 26.)
- The Illinois Department of Agriculture is working on the logistics of establishing the Illinois Local Food, Farms and Jobs Council since both chambers of the legislature approved a bill — **HB 3990** — calling for its creation (see *Illinois Issues*, June, page 15.)

Re-thinking Soup, reinforcing community

When Jane Addams and friend, Ellen Gates Starr, co-founded Hull-House in Chicago, their goal was simple: to provide services to the city's immigrant population and to improve living conditions. Established in 1889, the settlement house offered educational opportunities to those who most needed them, ranging from kindergarten to night classes, in addition to a public kitchen, bathhouse, art gallery and library.

It created a legacy of social and public research, which lives on through Re-thinking Soup, a lunch series that not only provides food for the body but food for the mind and soul.

Re-thinking Soup, which recently celebrated its one-year anniversary, is held every Tuesday from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the dining room of the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

"Jane Addams really believed in democracy and freedom of speech," says Lisa Lee, the museum's director, who says Re-Thinking Soup fosters scholarly, issue-based discussions in a space where people can speak their minds and share their ideas and opinions.

Re-thinking Soup's programs revolve around such social issues as animal rights, sustainability, agriculture and justice. In January, the Hull-House Museum, in conjunction with UIC's Office of Sustainability and Department of Biological

Sciences, created a Hull-House Center for Urban Agriculture. Its mission is to create and sustain an organic garden and farm to stress the ideas of community and sustainability. Last month, the less-than-one-acre urban farm produced its first yield of seasonal vegetables.

The urban farm, which uses land Hull-House is borrowing from UIC's biology department, is devoted to heirloom vegetables such as tomatoes, carrots, peas, turnips, radishes and onions. The Hull-House kitchen uses the vegetables to make soups for the weekly program, but they are also preserved for the winter and sold at local farmers markets and cultural centers in downtown Chicago, Lee says.

"There has been a consistently great turnout since we started. The community has really grown, and it's been an incredible experience to see how the people from the city react to the food and the farm. It's been pleasurable and tasty," she says with a laugh.

Re-thinking Soup will continue until July 8, when its summer hiatus begins, and will reopen August 19. July 8 also marks the Hull-House Kitchen Preservation Fundraiser, where chefs and food preservationists will donate their preserved fruits and jams to be auctioned off. The proceeds will benefit Re-thinking Soup and help fund its future programs.

Nicole Harbour

Photographs courtesy of the College of Architecture and the Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago



Community members gather for the opening session of Re-thinking Soup at the Residents' Dining Hall, where such notables as W.E.B. Dubois, Upton Sinclair, Gertrude Stein and Ida B. Wells once met to share meals and ideas.



Hull-House kitchen manager Tara Lane ladles soup made from the urban farm vegetables.

For more news see the Illinois Issues Web site at <http://illinoisisssues.uis.edu>

Wind power

Illinois is at a turning point in its energy-producing future

by Michael Hawthorne

When a railcar manufacturer shuttered its Clinton plant a decade ago, the sudden loss of 150 jobs was another troubling sign of economic woes plaguing small towns throughout Illinois. But now the factory is back open and retooled to churn out some of the state's hottest commodities: components for wind turbines sprouting up across the flatlands.

Trinity Industries, a Texas-based company, fired up its DeWitt County plant again to meet a growing need for massive towers that support wind turbines, which can rise up to 30 stories tall and feature twirling blades as long as several semitrailers. Overhauling the central Illinois facility made it easier and less expensive to ship the bulky structures to dozens of wind farms under development throughout the Midwest. The project also is among a series of business ventures and policy decisions that have marked a turning point in Illinois' energy future, one that only now is becoming apparent to people outside the nascent wind industry.

In a state that for decades has been dominated by coal and nuclear power, wind energy is steadily becoming a big deal in Illinois. Other states boast stronger winds, and some are further ahead in attracting investment from renewable energy companies. But many parts of Illinois are windy enough to be suitable for wind farms. Moreover, the state already has a well-developed transmission grid that makes it easier to

dispatch electricity generated through wind power from rural sites to energy-hungry cities. And after falling behind other states in offering incentives, state government has taken a number of steps to make Illinois more attractive for wind development. "We're on the verge of becoming one of the nation's centers for wind power," says Howard Learner, executive director of the Environmental Law and Policy Center, a Chicago-based nonprofit group that has long advocated for a more diverse energy mix.

Growing concerns about climate change, lingering problems with air pollution and rising construction costs to build new coal and nuclear plants are giving a boost to wind power. Seeking to curb pollution that is driving up global temperatures, President Barack Obama is pushing for legislation that would cap carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases and let companies trade the right to pollute, which could make wind an even bigger player in the energy market. Similar to an existing "cap and trade" system that has reduced sulfur dioxide pollution from coal plants, the Obama plan would let cleaner companies sell credits, or pollution allowances, to dirtier firms, as long as they all stayed below a national limit.

With major investment banks signaling they are going to consider the cost of greenhouse gases before financing new power plants, dozens of proposed coal-fired boilers have been defeated, canceled or placed indefinitely on hold

during the past two years. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Energy estimates that wind energy could end up providing a fifth of the nation's electricity by 2030. The chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission recently made an even bolder statement, suggesting the surge of new wind, solar and other sources of renewable power means the United States won't need new coal or nuclear plants. "We may not need any, ever," Jon Wellinghoff told reporters from the Greenwire news service at a U.S. Energy Association forum in April.

One of the key policy changes nudging Illinois toward a greener future is the General Assembly's approval of a renewable portfolio standard, or RPS, that requires power companies to get 10 percent of their electricity from green energy sources by 2015 and 25 percent by 2025. The measure, passed in 2007 and strengthened earlier this year, requires that three-quarters of the new renewable energy should come from wind power. More than two dozen states have adopted similar standards, and a sweeping energy bill moving through Congress would impose a national version. Encouraged in part by those guarantees, companies now have about 1,000 megawatts of wind power online in Illinois, enough to power 300,000 homes. Turbines that will generate an additional 312 megawatts are under construction, and experts estimate the state eventually could provide



The Twin Groves Wind Farm is near Bloomington.

up to 10,000 megawatts of wind power. Gov. Pat Quinn is a strong supporter. In April, Quinn said he wants to see wind turbines "in every nook and cranny of our state."

Even before Illinois set a renewable energy requirement, one of the nation's largest wind farms started going up in rural McLean County, about 25 miles east of Bloomington. The Twin Groves Wind Farm rises above rolling corn and soybean fields near the headwaters of the Sangamon River, where the flat prairie gives way to windy moraines and the tallest thing for miles used to be a random grain elevator. Horizon Wind Energy has erected 240 turbines that dot the landscape around the small towns of Saybrook, Arrowsmith and Ellsworth, and the company plans to add more in the near future. "We took a gamble at the time, but it's one that paid off," says Bill Whitlock, the company's development director. "You have a very windy state and a strong [renewable energy] standard that is driving a lot of investment." Horizon, a Houston-based company, is building two other large wind farms in Illinois, one that straddles Logan and Tazewell counties and another in LaSalle County.

Coal and nuclear power still are likely to generate a substantial portion of the state's electricity, at least for the near future. Power plants that burn the black, carbon-rich fuel now provide about half of Illinois' energy, though the owners of most of the state's aging plants have

abandoned the use of Illinois coal. Nuclear plants add nearly as much power, while wind and other renewable sources account for less than 1 percent. That number may be small now, but there are environmental and economic drawbacks to both of the more established forms of electrical generation. Coal plants are the state's largest source of heat-trapping carbon dioxide and mercury emissions and are major sources of air pollution that creates lung-damaging smog and soot. Nuclear plants, meanwhile, generate large amounts of radioactive waste. Then there are sobering memories of the skyrocketing costs to build the current fleet of nuclear plants, one factor that has made financiers wary to back the construction of new reactors.

Illinois, like many other states, is in the midst of a fierce battle between companies looking to cash in on the next wave of energy projects. Several coal plants are moving forward despite the financial and regulatory uncertainty. The biggest is a 1,600-megawatt plant in Washington County being built by the nation's largest coal company, St. Louis-based Peabody Energy. The giant plant would provide electricity to 2.5 million people in nine states. It also would be the largest source of carbon dioxide built in the United States in more than two decades, churning out 12 million tons of the gas every year. Peabody's plant may be the last of its kind, though. At one point, Illinois had

more new coal plants on the drawing board than any other state, with state officials boasting that at least 10 projects would burn coal mined in the southern part of the state. Just three remain active, and only one would be designed to keep carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere by injecting it deep underground.

Because coal is the most carbon-intensive way to generate electricity, it could end up becoming more expensive than nuclear power or natural gas, according to a recent study by the Electric Power Research Institute, an industry trade group. "The landscape is changing quickly," says Ron Burke, head of the Chicago office for the Union of Concerned Scientists. "Even the big companies that have relied on coal are starting to invest in wind and other renewable energy. They see the writing on the wall, too."

A model for the transition to cleaner energy is the city of Springfield. In a unique deal between traditional antagonists, the municipal utility — City Water, Light and Power — scrapped an old, inefficient coal plant and replaced it with a larger unit that will get more out of the Illinois coal it burns. After negotiations with the Sierra Club, the Springfield utility also is making a huge investment in carbon-free wind energy, drawing enough to power the Statehouse and other state office buildings. Even with the larger coal unit, CWLP is expected to generate 25 percent less

carbon dioxide than it did before, a feat equivalent to taking more than 100,000 cars off the road. "Plus we still have some of the lowest rates in the state," says Eric Hobbie, the utility's chief engineer.

CWLP wasn't required to invest in wind energy or do anything else to address climate change. But the deal cleared the way for quick approval and construction of its new 200-megawatt Dallman 4 unit. The 120 megawatts of wind power Springfield is purchasing will be split evenly between the city and state government. Another selling point is the utility will burn locally mined coal. Most of the state's other power companies have switched to coal from Western states, which generally is cheaper and contains less sulfur. By contrast, Springfield installed sulfur dioxide scrubbers to remove the harmful pollution. The city also agreed to boost spending on energy conservation programs. "It's remarkable that this happened in the heart of coal country," said Bruce Nilles, a Sierra Club attorney who has played a key role in fighting proposed new coal plants and helped negotiate the Springfield agreement.

Even though proponents are giddy about the prospects for more wind power in Illinois, many projects still encounter vocal opposition, including from some homeowners who live close by and see the giant turbines as a blight on the landscape that could diminish

their property values. About 700 people packed a rural DeKalb County gymnasium last winter to oppose a project that would plant 133 turbines in the area. One woman wondered if the drone from the turbines would affect honeybees that pollinate her apple orchard. Others said the towers would spoil their pastoral views. "I'm concerned we're prostituting our countryside," said Mel Hass of Shabbona, according to the *Chicago Tribune*.

Then there are the challenges of handling the projected surge of wind power from 1 percent to 20 percent of the nation's energy mix. Operators of the electrical grid in the eastern United States estimate that it could cost \$80 billion to build transmission lines to carry the load. Building enough wind turbines to meet that target would cost an additional \$1.1 trillion.

During the recently completed legislative session, state lawmakers overwhelmingly approved a measure that would give wind projects a boost by extending enterprise zone authority to rural areas where turbines are located. The bill, which Quinn is expected to sign, would save developers \$10 million in sales and use taxes for every 100 megawatts constructed. However, wind power interests fell short with another initiative that would require power companies to negotiate long-term contracts with wind developers. The proposal would cut the price of wind power and make it more competitive

with coal and nuclear energy. "That's one of our biggest challenges in Illinois," Horizon's Whitlock says.

Once the kinks are worked out, wind power will become even more prevalent in Illinois. Farmers are sold by the money they can make leasing land to wind developers. Counties like the money generated by new sources of property taxes. And business and labor are attracted by the prospect of new jobs. There already are about 1,000 wind-related jobs in the state. Besides the Trinity plant in Clinton, a unit of the German firm Siemens A.G. is building a gear works in Elgin. Brad Foote Gear Works in Cicero and a handful of other companies have shifted toward more wind-related production. Another German firm, Nordex, recently opened a North American headquarters in Chicago.

The changes were evident in early May at the annual Windpower Conference & Exhibition held in Chicago, where more than 23,000 people and 1,200 exhibitors flocked to promote the power of the future. In 2004, the last time the conference was held in Chicago, just 3,000 attended.

"At no time in our history has the time for a new energy policy been so urgent," Interior Secretary Ken Salazar told the conventioneers. "This is an opportunity that Americans cannot afford to miss." □

Michael Hawthorne is the environment reporter for the Chicago Tribune.

Photographs courtesy of Horizon Wind Energy



Turbines at the Twin Groves Wind Farm

River man

The founder of Living Lands & Waters guides hundreds of volunteers in collecting trash from the state's major waterways

by Beverley Scobell

Chad Pregracke is a man on a mission. Raised "10 feet from the river" in Hampton near East Moline, he grew up with the Mississippi as his playground. As a teenager, he worked in its silt-filled bottoms as a mussel diver and quit college to be a commercial fisherman. But his passion for wanting his view of the river free from debris has led to his life's work. At 34, he is director of the non-profit foundation Living Lands & Waters, and as such, he and thousands of volunteers over the past 15 years have collected tons of trash from the banks of the Mississippi, Illinois and Ohio rivers.

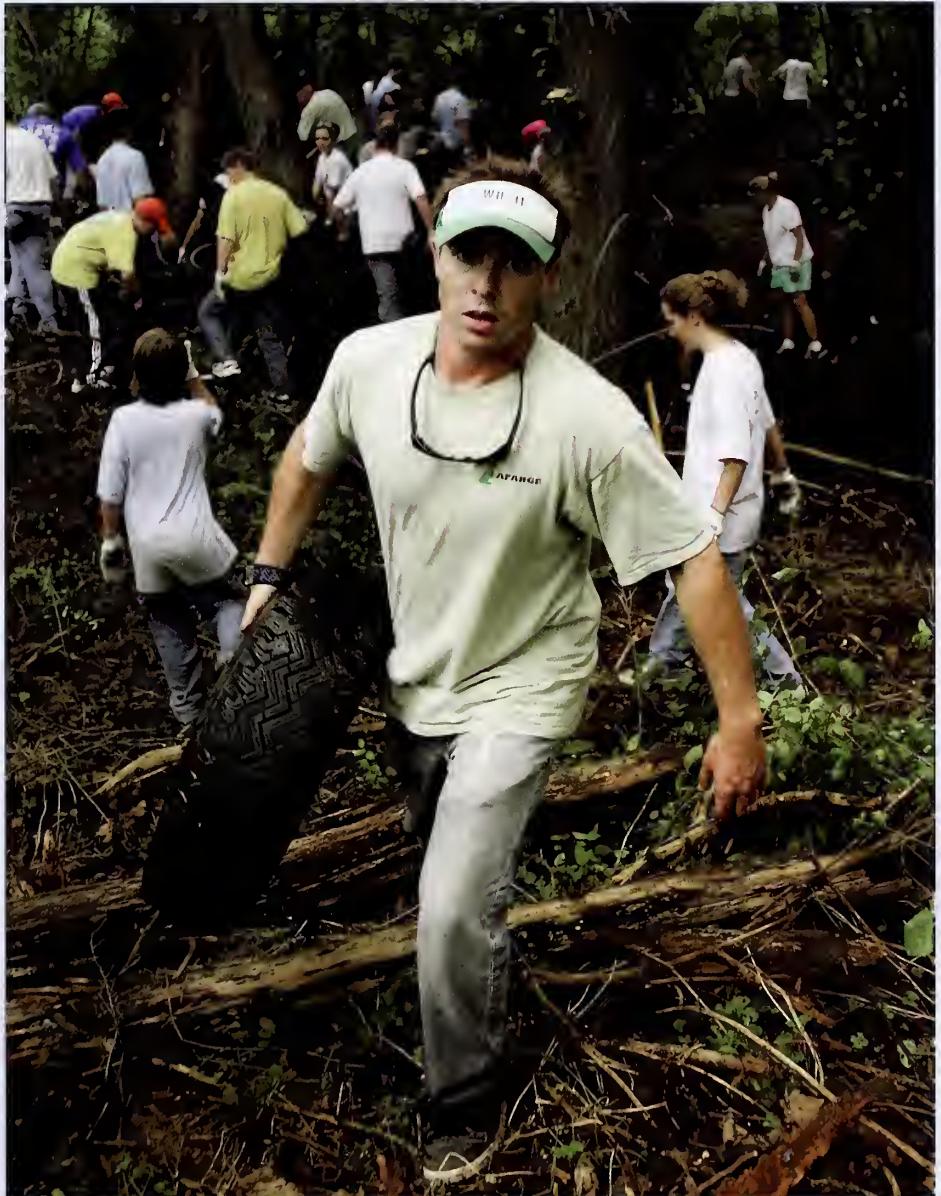
In a 1997 CNN story, Pregracke was described as a modern-day Huck Finn. But his labors in carrying out the monumental task of ridding the state's rivers of decades of debris have been more Herculean. Like the Greek hero, he has succeeded in his trials more by chance, grit and the kindness of strangers than by any grand plan thought out ahead of time.

"I just saw all this trash on the islands. Nobody was picking it up. So I did," he says.

After filling his flat-bottomed boat several times over with old tires, oil drums, appliances and junk of all kinds, he unloaded it onto the dock at his parents' house to be sorted and recycled. Gary and Keekee Pregracke, career educators, "weren't too thrilled with that," he says.

When just 23, he landed his first corporate sponsor. "I was walking past

Photograph by Greg Boll, courtesy of Living Lands & Waters



Chad Pregracke leads volunteers at an XStream Cleanup event in the Quad Cities area.



Pregracke on the barge amid hundreds of bags of trash

Pregracke and his crew and thousands of volunteers have picked up an estimated 6 million pounds of trash, including 55,301 tires, 775 refrigerators, 179 washing machines, 12 porta-potties, 41 shopping carts

the TV at a buddy's house and saw this NASCAR driver get out of his car, and he had all these corporate logos all over his suit. I said to myself, 'That's what I need: logos.'" More specifically, the corporate money behind the logos.

He picked up the Quad Cities phone book and there under "A" was Alcoa. Tim Wilkinson, who retired from the company in May as vice president of North American Public Strategy Group, doesn't usually answer unfiltered calls, but he did that day.

As a liaison to the community at the time, Wilkinson agreed to meet with Pregracke. "The receptionist walked back to my office and said there's a young man in bib overalls and a baseball cap with long hair who wants to talk to you about cleaning up the Mississippi River."

Intrigued and inspired by Pregracke's "unbridled enthusiasm" and dedication to his vision, Wilkinson held open the door to eventual funding, provided

Pregracke would bring back a plan and a budget.

"I said, 'No problem,' but I didn't have a clue how to form a business plan or make up a budget," says Pregracke.

His mom came to his rescue and helped him create a budget of \$8,400 for a bare bones operation. Alcoa agreed. It was much less than the \$77,000 he had asked for at that first meeting, but it launched his journey.

After people started noticing what he was doing and he got some press, grain companies such as Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland and Bunge sponsored his cleanup efforts.

As of 2008, Pregracke and his crew (currently 10 full-time and three part-time paid staff) and thousands of volunteers have picked up an estimated 6 million pounds of trash, including 55,301 tires, 775 refrigerators, 179 washing machines, 12 porta-potties, 41 shopping carts, 181 coolers, 12 bowling balls, 5,207 55-gallon drums,



Living Lands & Waters houseboat/barge, with garbage that was collected on the banks of the Illinois and Mississippi rivers

54 250-gallon drums, 24 bathtubs, 179 TVs, 12 bags of police riot gear, two pianos, 48 messages in a bottle, 7,913 feet of barge cable and enough 1-inch-thick styrofoam to cover 11 football fields.

Freebies — whether from volunteers who show up for a day's work or from corporations that donate "whatever Chad needs" — are key to the success of Living Lands & Waters.

Ingram Barge Co., which runs 1,000 barges on the Mississippi, Ohio and Illinois rivers, was an early corporate sponsor. "When Chad came on the scene in 1998-99, we were impressed that essentially a single person, who was probably in his early 20s then, had come up with the idea of cleaning up the upper Mississippi River," says Dan Mecklenborg, senior vice president and chief legal counsel. "He had the energy, the personality and the can-do attitude that attracted people who were sitting in offices miles from the river to buy into

his vision, his dream that we could make our rivers cleaner and make them a better place for not only those of us who work on the rivers but for those who use them recreationally."

The Nashville, Tenn.-based Ingram, along with other commercial transportation companies, sponsor an annual river cleanup in Paducah, Ky. For each of the past three years, about 200 employees of the companies spent a day picking up trash. "Interestingly," says Mecklenborg, "we always go to the Illinois side of the river to clean. Chad must have a fondness for Illinois riverbanks."

In the most recent cleanup effort, the barge companies paid for 215 of their employees to make the trip to Paducah from Nashville, St. Louis and other places. "With their help," says Pregracke, "in about four hours we were able to fill a barge load of garbage."

But does a less trashy river mean a cleaner river?

"Absolutely," says Glynnis Collins, executive director of the Prairie Rivers Network, a nonprofit based in Champaign. "We're certainly concerned about the organisms living in the river, but we're also concerned about people being able to enjoy the river — fishing, boating, swimming, and also just aesthetically, the aesthetic pleasure they get from seeing this beautiful, mighty river. Removing the trash affects all those things, especially the big, unsightly, horrible debris that Chad's group gets out."

Marcia Willhite agrees, but "cleaner" water has a more specific definition to the chief of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency's water division.

"Water quality has improved immensely over the past 35 years," she says, "but to make progress in the next 35 years, we have to address nonpoint source pollution."

The agency basically tackles water pollution from two broad sources:



Living Lands & Waters crew members work alongside volunteers on the barge.

“It’ll take either putting in place requirements for nonpoint source pollution control or much more incentive than we’ve been able to provide to date.”

***—Marcia Willhite
of the state EPA***

point, which describes harmful elements entering streams from such places as factories or water treatment plants; and nonpoint, which includes sediment, excess nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen, and rainwater runoff carrying oils and chemicals from lawns and parking lots.

Point-source pollution is closely regulated by federal and state laws, though watchdog groups such as the Prairie Rivers Network argue that government needs to do more to control the amount of such pollutants as fecal coliform bacteria. Nonpoint source pollution is far less regulated and is approached through incentive programs.

In 2008, the state agency handed out nearly \$4.5 million in federal Clean Water Act grants to landowners, municipalities and others for the implementation of “best management practices” for nonpoint source pollution control. The grants cover such projects as sediment control basins, streambank

restoration, recreation area improvements and educational programs. Living Lands & Waters has received \$63,250 to aid its efforts.

Willhite says progress will be slow if the state continues to follow the same approach toward nonpoint source pollution as in the past decade. “It’ll take either putting in place requirements for nonpoint source pollution control or much more incentive than we’ve been able to provide to date.”

Mike Dimissie, head of the Illinois State Water Survey, agrees and adds that river trash is just one form of nonpoint source pollution that needs to be addressed. “Nonpoint source pollution is a complex issue, and that is why we need good data to support implementation of policies.”

The state environmental protection agency tests about 20 percent of the more than 70,000 miles of streams and rivers in Illinois. The most recent data shows that about 60 percent of the



Pregracke gets ready to transfer trash to the barge.

waterways sampled were rated clean enough to support aquatic life. The percentage is about the same for safe fish consumption but much lower for public water supplies and swimming.

Pregracke stresses he's not a scientist. But as someone who has closely observed the state's rivers for more than three decades, he can say with some authority that Illinois' main rivers appear cleaner.

"As far as trash and garbage goes, I've seen what I like to call social change happen on the upper Mississippi River, as well as the Illinois River," he says. "People are not treating the river as bad as they once were. ... It's hard to find a pop can in some places."

The problem he sees causing the most concern is siltation, which he says is getting "worse and worse." Sediment chokes plant and animal life and creates shallower streams that become more prone to flooding.

However, he also sees restoration

efforts and changes in farming practices beginning to take hold. He points to such nonprofit groups as The Nature Conservancy and the work they are doing at the Emiquon Preserve, the Wetlands Initiative and Ducks Unlimited. But he also credits farmers for using no-till planting and government programs such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

But Pregracke has also taken his organization toward restoration of the river banks. In 2007, Living Lands & Waters took on the task of organizing volunteers to meet the ambitious goal of planting a million trees in communities and along the waterways. Volunteers, many of them children, collect acorns and other seeds, which they plant in a nursery on a three-acre plot donated by Cargill in Beardstown. Denise Mitten, the project coordinator, says they've planted 440,000 acorns, not all of which grow. But they trans-

plant those that do sprout when they are about a foot tall. She says they expect to reach their million-tree goal within a decade.

Living Lands & Waters also offers educational seminars to teachers and other interested groups on board the foundation's house barge, which was donated by John Eckstein, owner of Marquette Transportation Co. based in Paducah. "It used to be his office, and now it's my office," says Pregracke.

The crew's living room turns into a classroom for the presentations. Since 2003, the organization has had 1,700 schoolteachers, naturalists and others on board. Tammy Becker, education coordinator, says that 80 percent of teachers surveyed report they incorporated what they learned into their lesson plans.

"We believe that if these young kids get to know and to value the river system, they will become stewards of their rivers," says Becker.

When the houseboat/barge is not hosting guests, it is home for the crew for about nine months while the rivers are navigable. Just as Pregracke was inspired by NASCAR logos to ask for corporate help, maneuvering his small boat around the massive grain barges moving up and down the river led him to the conclusion: "I need a barge." He got the first one from a gravel company in Moline and the one that became his floating home and headquarters from Marquette's Eckstein in Paducah.

"He gave it to us for free, and he still gives us rides," says Pregracke. Eckstein also became a believer in the cause. "He's our top sponsor. Anything we ask, he makes happen for us."

Pregracke's barge often hitches free rides up and down the rivers attached to barge company tows. When *Illinois Issues* caught up with him, his barge was being towed up the Illinois River by St. Louis-based AEP River Operations in preparation for a season of garbage-gathering events planned for "nearly every town" along the Illinois. "It saves so much fuel and time and staff and money. It's kind of hard to plan sometimes, but bottom line is we're able to get more done and do it for less."

Though Pregracke has a knack for showing people how to have fun doing hard, dirty, unpaid work, he is quick to give the volunteers the majority of the credit for the foundation's successes. "More and more people are getting involved each year, and that's how change happens."

People who give up a day of their weekend to haul heavy tires, toys, lawn furniture, appliances and other such jetsam and flotsam of life and floods begin to feel they have a stake in the river, he says. "So some of those big issues like siltation and runoff and development and things like that will be focused on more by many." Pregracke feels his foundation has created an opportunity for people to do something positive and to see the results instantly. "Hopefully," he says, "they'll take the next step and organize a cleanup on their own or call their state legislators, join other groups or get active in different ways." □

The Million Trees Project

Living Lands & Waters has been collecting and planting seeds of native hardwood trees at a nursery in Beardstown with the goal of growing 1 million trees in the next five to 10 years. Those trees will be replanted along the shorelines and on the islands of the state's major waterways, as well as within the towns and cities of volunteers.

Over the past 150 years, tree diversity has declined along the shores of rivers such as the Illinois, Mississippi and Ohio. Most of the native fruit- and nut-bearing hardwood trees that once grew were depleted for fuel and building materials during the Steamboat Era and by flooding and disease.

The residual effect has been a monoculture of cottonwoods, silver maples and willows, which outgrow and crowd out many native fruit- and nut-bearing hardwoods, such as oaks, hickories, hackberries, mulberries, pecan and paw paw.

Diversifying the current makeup of trees along shorelines helps protect against viruses, bores and other threats that could otherwise deplete an entire forest made up of just one or two species.

Native trees have evolved in a regional environment, allowing them to develop natural defenses to withstand many types of insects and diseases, as well as severe winters and summer droughts. They typically thrive with minimal maintenance and

have a much higher survival rate than non-native or "introduced" tree species. Native trees that evolved with local flora and fauna help support the web of life without being overwhelmed by it.

Yet, many species of wildlife have nearly disappeared from the riverbanks because of the absence of food. The trees that currently grow on the river have little or no food value for wildlife. The Million Trees Project will only plant trees that produce nuts and fruits so that ducks, songbirds, squirrels, wild turkeys and other animals have a viable food source. These strong hardwoods create a welcoming habitat for wildlife and nesting birds.

For aquatic life, shade from trees keeps waterways cool during hot weather. The shade also reduces the intensity of algae blooms and the undesirable overgrowth of vegetation caused by high concentrations of plant nutrients in the water.

Trees act as filters and help reduce the amount of pollution and runoff entering the state's creeks, rivers and streams. Long and strong roots help keep the ground in place and reduce erosion. Leaves filter the air and produce oxygen. And by absorbing carbon, trees reduce the impact of climate change.

Aside from all the health and wildlife benefits, trees increase the aesthetics of a landscape everywhere they are planted. □

from Living Lands & Waters materials





Switched on

The fledgling Illinois Power Agency bought electricity on behalf of utilities for the first time this spring. Consumers' bills decreased, but market uncertainty remains

by Bethany Jaeger

The ease of flipping a switch on a kitchen wall masks the complicated process that flows electricity to homes and businesses.

Electricity customers can be blissfully unaware that the process underwent a regulatory facelift of sorts over the past two years. Commonwealth Edison, which serves the northern part of the state, and Ameren Illinois, which serves the central and southern regions, no longer procure their own power loads.

The Illinois Power Agency does it for them.

The one-year-old agency has one employee, Mark Pruitt, who coordinates the procurement process. He's supposed to have a small staff, but state budget woes wiped out his ability to hire employees by the time he carried out the agency's inaugural venture this spring.

Nevertheless, the Illinois Power Agency managed to take advantage of cheaper wholesale prices, thanks, in part, to reduced demand during the national recession. Starting in June, typical ComEd customers could save about \$94 on their bills this year. Average Ameren Illinois customers who use about 10,000 kilowatt hours could save about \$100, although the utility is seeking state approval to raise delivery rates.

Reasons for the lower costs vary and depend on the source, but all agree that the process is more transparent and reassuring to consumers. Numerous questions going forward include how the IPA

will fit within the national picture as states try to figure out new ways to re-regulate the power industry while still allowing market competition to spur innovation.

Uncertainty within the marketplace is matched by uncertainty within Illinois state government.

Pruitt did not know in mid-June whether he would remain with the agency beyond this summer because Gov. Pat Quinn is under legislative pressure to re-evaluate high-level appointees of the two previous governors, George Ryan and Rod Blagojevich. Both have been targets of federal corruption probes. Pruitt was a Blagojevich appointee and says he "serves at the pleasure." Quinn could opt to reappoint him but has not indicated whether he would do so.

In any case, Pruitt is responsible for analyzing each scenario, per state law, to provide sustainable, reliable, low-cost electricity with consideration for stability over time.

"The IPA, from a procurement perspective, is not here to go find cheap electricity," he told a House committee in late May. "There is no cheap electricity. We buy electricity from a market. Prices in that market change over time."

Instead, state law mandates that the agency, with cooperation of the utilities, procure energy as close to market prices as possible.

The new process was born out of necessity, says Susan Hedman, senior

policy adviser to Attorney General Lisa Madigan. As part of the effort to regulate electric rates in 1997, the state sold off its power generating plants and tried to spark competition at the retail level. It didn't work, says Hedman. So the state had to come up with a new system that fostered competition but did not invite collusion between the power generators and their affiliated utilities.

"Illinois is a very unique kind of environment because we haven't done deregulation very well. We didn't do deregulation very well. Now what we're trying to do is create a model that actually works to the benefit of consumers."

There was an inherent perception problem in the 2006 power auction because utilities were conducting a process to buy electricity from their own affiliates that generate power. According to the attorney general's complaint filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, ComEd's parent company, Exelon Generation, won 97 percent of ComEd's contracts over 41 months.

"Unless or until ComEd and Ameren no longer have the same set of stockholders as do Exelon Generation and Ameren Generation, that's a problem," Hedman said to the committee. "And that's why we need the Illinois Power Agency. We can then say with certainty that there is not a problem with the linkage there."

Madigan's office was part of the driving force behind the 2007 changes.

Utilities don't profit from the cost of energy. They simply pass that cost on to their customers, which accounts for about two-thirds of their overall bills. Utilities make their profits from a charge to deliver that power.

as was House Speaker Michael Madigan, the attorney general's father. They led the General Assembly in approving a new law to restructure the process and create the Illinois Power Agency.

The agency would purchase electricity on behalf of utility customers, taking procurement activity out of the hands of utilities and assigning it to an impartial entity, Hedman says. "It's a completely different process. The public can feel confident that it is an objective process."

Utilities don't profit from the cost of energy. They simply pass that cost on to their customers, which accounts for about two-thirds of their overall bills. Utilities make their profits from a charge to deliver that power. Delivery charges, which are regulated by the Illinois Commerce Commission, make up the remaining one-third of utility bills.

In early 2007, electric bills skyrocketed after a 10-year rate freeze expired along with a state deregulation law. The new system to procure power came in the form of an auction.

Results angered customers and pressured state lawmakers, as winning bids came in about 21 percent higher than wholesale market prices for ComEd customers and 13 percent higher for Ameren customers. Residents who lived in housing units powered solely by electricity anecdotally saw their bills increase by as much as 300 percent (see *Illinois Issues*, June 2007, page 20).

George Gross, professor of electrical and computer engineering at the



Republican Reps. Mike Fortner of West Chicago, at left, and Dave Winters of Shirland, at right, receive an update about the Illinois Power Agency buying electricity from the wholesale market.

University of Illinois with an appointment in the Institute of Government and Public Affairs, says the auction resulted in "artificial" contracts that were unfavorable to consumers. He helped write a 2008 analysis published in *The Electricity Journal* that says utilities had to enter into bulk contracts at fixed prices, shifting all uncertainty — and risk — from utilities to the power generating companies. That resulted in higher-than-market prices to cover the risk of not knowing the total load that would be needed.

Gross likens the 2006 auction to running a bus company that would have to run a certain number of buses without knowing the number of riders or how many buses would be needed to accommodate them. "If I buy 250 [buses], who will pay for extra buses that I'm not going to be using?"

He says the new process now conducted by the Illinois Power Agency addressed the major criticisms of the 2006 auction and is much more aligned with the way power is generated. The risk of uncertainty has shifted back to the utilities, he adds.

The Illinois Commerce Commission conducted the first procurement event in 2008, while the Illinois Power Agency was being formed.

This year marked the agency's debut procurement event. For Ameren Illinois customers, the bidding process resulted in a 13.6 percent reduction in wholesale prices (the supply component of customers' bills), which translates into

about an 8 percent decrease to their overall bills.

ComEd's 12.5 percent reduction in wholesale power cost translates to about a 9 percent decrease to its customers' bills.

The five purchasing events this spring procured up to 30 percent of the utilities' overall supply. The staggered procurement process contributes to stability and reduces the potential for rate shock in the future, says Jim Blessing, manager of power supply acquisition and strategic initiatives for Ameren.

Consumers' bills decreased for various reasons. In addition to a sharp decline in wholesale market rates, Hedman says one of the major reforms in the 2007 law was to require benchmarks for prices. They allow the Illinois Power Agency to screen out prices that are far above market rates and select the lowest bidders. The auction process of 2006, she says, did not use benchmarks to filter out high bidders.

Utilities support the new process.

William McNeil, vice president of energy acquisition for ComEd, describes it as a "reasonable way" to procure power through a competitive bidding process and anticipates "small tweaks" for the 2010 procurement event.

He says it's important to note that utilities bought different products in the 2006 auction than in the 2009 process, and he agrees to disagree with consumer advocates that the 2006 auction didn't track market prices.

But both ComEd and Ameren officials

The demand for power and the market will continue to morph as manufacturing plants close and as fuel-efficient vehicles become more available. Energy prices also could spike if the federal government further regulates the release of carbon pollutants.



agree that the 2009 process is more transparent. Rather than buying 100 percent of everything needed in a single package, the new process allows the IPA to buy blocks of energy for utilities that can be easily compared to prices in the New York Mercantile Exchange, a trading forum for energy and metals.

"The competitive bidding process ensures that, regardless," says Craig Nelson, vice president with Ameren Illinois. "But having the added feature of standard products with a visible market price is double assurance that we're buying things at market price. So, yes, it's working very well."

Tim Anderson, executive director of the Illinois Commerce Commission, said during the May committee hearing that the process includes checks and balances by hiring an independent monitor. Boston Pacific is a consulting firm in Washington, D.C., that specializes in the electricity and natural gas business.

"They review everything as it's happening, so there's a lot of eyes throughout the whole process," Anderson said.

But Rep. Dave Winters, a Republican on the committee, asked Pruitt how the IPA could procure energy more efficiently than if the utilities did it themselves.

"I think that's a fair question, and I've wrestled with it myself a number of times," Pruitt said.

The nearly 60-step process might not be the sole reason for lower electric bills this year, he added, but "the value that's brought by the Illinois Power Agency is that there is a governance mandate to the

IPA to manage the process to the benefit of consumers. That's my No. 1 priority. It's not for developers. It's not for the utilities."

According to Gross, the risk is shifting in the right direction, back toward the utilities, but he doesn't know whether it has gone far enough.

"Only time will tell," he says, "because we're also still in an era of relatively rapid changes."

The demand for power and the market will continue to morph as manufacturing plants close and as fuel-efficient vehicles become more available. Energy prices also could spike if the federal government further regulates the release of carbon pollutants.

As the Illinois Power Agency's portfolio manager, Pruitt has to account for such risks, which he defines as anything that's unexpected, either positive or negative. And every risk carries a cost.

Part of the strategy to protect consumers includes diversifying the state's energy mix, just as investors diversify their investment portfolios.

One idea, which invites opposing viewpoints, is to enter into longer-term contracts, potentially as long as 20 years. The idea is to build in some certainty for producers and for the buyers, says Gross. The state's portfolio, then, could be less subject to frequent changes that could occur in a short amount of time.

The ongoing risk for the IPA, however, is that consumers could leave the utilities and opt to receive power

from alternative retail suppliers. When large companies leave the utilities' customer base, the cost of long-term contracts would have to be spread among a smaller group of customers who remain.

That debate could fuel the possibility of state government eventually owning a power-generating plant, Pruitt says.

Speaker Madigan introduced a resolution this spring that would require the IPA to report about the feasibility of reintegrating power generators into the regulatory mix. That's akin to the former model of regulation: expanding the rate base in hopes of protecting consumers from market volatility.

The 2007 state law allows the Illinois Power Agency to own such a plant, provided the first one uses Illinois coal with environmentally friendly technology to reduce pollution.

Lawmakers already approved an exploration of a plant near Taylorville in Christian County. It would be owned by Nebraska-based Tenaska Inc. (See *Illinois Issues*, June 2008, page 6.)

A state-owned power plant is a long way off, but Gross says electricity is too important to be left unregulated. "The hand of government is always going to be there."

Ultimately, the Illinois Power Agency always will be in a state of transition, constantly educating investors about the regulatory environment and educating customers, who would rather flip the switch and not question how the lights come on. □

Rain, rain, go away

Rain barrels, gardens and permeable pavement ease floods and pollution in urban areas, but such tactics face financial and environmental challenges

by Jamey Dunn

New businesses, housing and roads are signs of progress and economic growth, but development also blocks rain from plants and soil that soak up water. Urbanization creates rainwater runoff, which can flood and pollute local rivers and streams.

While new technologies have been developed to address the problem, they have only recently been implemented on a large scale. Developers, in turn, still consider them a risky investment.

At first glance, the federal economic stimulus plan appeared to be a boon for so-called green infrastructure, which allows rain to return to the water table in a slower and natural way. But environmentalists fear the stimulus funding could turn out to be a missed opportunity for substantial change in the way Illinois deals with storm water.

Roads, sidewalks, buildings and hard surfaces in urban areas leave rainwater rushing into storm drains that, in many cases, feed directly into Illinois streams and rivers. As water flows over city surfaces, it picks up pollution such as oil, trash and animal feces. It also can cause flooding, which creates hazards for residents and damages property and ecosystems.

A relatively new concept called green infrastructure is offering some potential solutions. Green infrastructure seeks to slow the flow of storm water so it can absorb into the ground.

Some of the technology includes rain gardens that hold water and slowly

release it. Rain barrels also collect water that can be used on gardens and yards. To improve water drainage in urban areas with a lot of concrete, there is a new type of pavement filled with small holes to allow water to soak into the ground. Another solution is to use open spaces of vegetation that do the same thing.

Chicago, which has more miles of alleys than any other city in the country, started in 2006 installing permeable pavement to help address flooding. Alleys in need of major repair are excavated and replaced with asphalt that allows water to seep through. Water then filters through a bed of rocks beneath the pavement and replenishes the underground water table.

The full excavation process is more expensive than simply repaving a crumbling alley. But, says Brian Steele, a spokesman for the Chicago Department of Transportation, the new alleys prevent flood damage to residents' homes and yards.

"It's the old adage — you get what you pay for," he says.

The permeable pavement is part of a green construction program that includes asphalt and concrete made from recycled materials, rooftop rain gardens and solar-powered bus shelters.

"When a lot of people think of infrastructure ... they don't necessarily think green," he says.

The effort to not only allow a place for water to flow but to build an environ-

mentally friendly infrastructure requires an attitude shift from "not treating rainwater as a waste source but as a resource," Steele says.

Rep. Elaine Nekritz, a Northbrook Democrat, says she became interested in green infrastructure because of chronic flooding problems in her district, which includes the Des Plaines River. It's been a 20-year debate.

"That's not a lack of will. That's not a lack of coordination. It just demonstrates the complexity of the issue," she says.

Nekritz sponsored **Senate Bill 1489**, legislation to require the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to study ways to implement regulations for "green" storm water management at the state and local levels.

If the report finds that regulations would be effective, Marcia Willhite, chief of the water bureau at the Illinois EPA, says she would like to move in that direction. "Certainly, with a regulatory framework, you get an assurance that actions will happen," she says.

Stacy James, a water resources scientist for the Champaign-based Prairie Rivers Network, agrees that more study must be done before mandates are issued to local governments. "At the very least," she says, "we need developers to be more educated."

Gov. Pat Quinn, a longtime advocate for water conservation, has made efforts to educate the general public on a smaller scale.

The Executive Mansion now uses rain barrels to catch rain that will be used to water the grounds. Thirty more rain barrels will speckle the Illinois State Fairgrounds this summer. His office also offers small grants for communities that want to build rain gardens.

"Seeing is believing," he says. "And that's part of what we have to do. We have to educate each other about how we can have a green future."

Attitudes toward green infrastructure, however, are slow to change.

James says communities and developers hesitate to veer from traditional methods of dealing with drainage. Their concern is that future maintenance could be costly or that something such as permeable pavement would not stand up to wear and tear.

"People are really worried about trying something new and having it fail," she says.

Steele from the Chicago Department of Transportation says the green alleys that have been in place since 2006 are maintaining their integrity and permeability. "So far, so good," he says.

Because green infrastructure projects on a large scale are relatively new, Chicago's green alleys and other projects serve as real-world testing grounds for the technology.

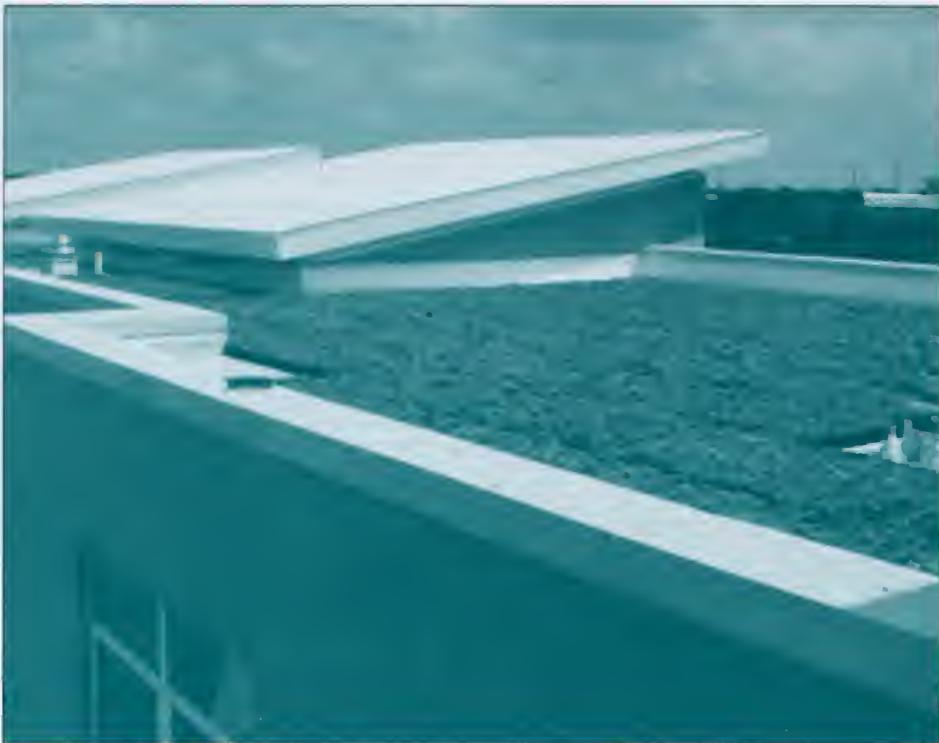
But not all green infrastructure projects are as functional as Chicago's green alleys. The University of Illinois at Springfield installed a green roof on Founders Hall dormitory last spring. A green roof is covered in plants that soak up rainwater and combat urban heat effect, which is caused by sunlight warming and reflecting off concrete and steel surfaces.

Because the campus is located at the edge of the city and has plenty of open spaces with trees and grass, Joan Buckles, the university's horticulturalist, says it does not face problems of urban flooding or urban heat.

While the roof could provide an opportunity for scientific study, it does not aggressively address one of the biggest environmental concerns facing the campus, namely, energy consumption, says Buckles.

The roof does make a small dent in heating costs by adding insulation, and David Barrows, an associate chancellor





The University of Illinois at Springfield installed a green roof on a dormitory last spring.

for the university, says the plants also extend the roof's life by protecting it from the sun. "We're still going through a learning process" about the value and maintenance of the roof, he says.

He adds that installing the roof was costly, about \$286,000.

Buckles says the university's efforts that are solely directed at energy efficiency, including installing energy-saving appliances in the dorms, serve a more practical purpose.

Green infrastructure could divert funding from other projects and may not produce the desired outcomes.

James from the Prairie Rivers Network says that although not all projects go exactly according to plan, Illinois needs to experiment with innovative ideas to find out what works. But Hal Sprague, senior policy associate for the Chicago-based Center for Neighborhood Technology, says the way Illinois has chosen to dole out money from the federal stimulus plan doesn't give communities incentive to try green infrastructure projects.

Twenty percent of the money given to Illinois must be used on green infrastructure or water efficiency projects.

Willhite of the Illinois EPA says many of the projects funded by the stimulus money would increase efficiency and

use traditional methods, including upgrading sewer lines, as opposed to employing newer technologies. That's partially because the most important qualification for a project to receive stimulus funds is to be "shovel-ready."

Because green infrastructure projects have just started to become more mainstream in recent years, Willhite says not many projects are ready to go in Illinois.

Illinois usually gives no-interest or low-interest loans for wastewater management projects. Communities are able to charge storm sewer fees, which create a built-in revenue source for the cities to repay those loans.

Green infrastructure projects funded through the stimulus funds could carry more risk for municipalities because they wouldn't have a built-in revenue source. While some stimulus funds will be given out in the form of grants, Illinois is opting to fund projects with a mix of grants and loans. Therefore, cities might hesitate to embark on green infrastructure projects for fear of being unable to repay the loans.

Sprague says he looks at what other states are doing. Kansas plans to provide the majority of funding for green projects through grants. Maryland is expected to distribute stimulus dollars entirely through grants. Sprague says he



A green roof is covered in plants that soak up rainwater and combat urban heat effect.

thinks Illinois could have done a better job setting up a funding structure that would encourage innovative storm water solutions.

"Illinois did it in a very simplistic way, and, in my opinion, they missed an opportunity."

Willhite from the Illinois EPA says the need for traditional wastewater projects such as storm drains and sewer lines is overwhelming. The agency has received requests of \$3.2 billion for wastewater projects and will get just \$177 million from the feds to spread around. She says the agency is considering starting a grant program specifically for green infrastructure projects in the near future.

Experts agree that more testing is needed to work out the kinks in a variety of environmental conditions. But in some cases, such as Chicago's green alley program, green infrastructure has potential to solve chronic problems and improve living conditions in urban areas.

James from the Prairie River's Network sums up what many say must happen to bring green infrastructure to the forefront as a viable solution for rainwater runoff. For better or worse, "some people need to be brave enough to just try it." □

Back to nature

New Natural Resources director finds himself at home in the wild world of state government

by Chris Young

Marc Miller was beaming, and he wasn't the only one.

Earlier this year, when Gov. Pat Quinn announced the reopening of seven state parks shuttered in a cost-cutting move by former Gov. Rod Blagojevich, Miller, the new head of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, stood by the new governor's side smiling broadly.

He had a lot of company.

At DNR headquarters, a shiny glass and metal building at the Illinois State Fairgrounds in Springfield, employees lined the railings of the atrium for three floors for the February 26 event. Everyone was in a festive mood.

The announcement was symbolic because on that day Quinn pledged to rebuild Natural Resources, an agency cut to the bone and left for dead by the Blagojevich administration.

Miller says the joke was that DNR stood for "Do Not Resuscitate."

"Our agency practically was on life support."

Illinois had been considered a conservation leader in the past; its programs, such as its system of nature preserves, are recognized internationally. But declining budgets, early retirements and the loss of key employees to other states or non-profit groups were taking a toll. Miller says the agency's share of the state's general tax revenue had dropped by about half — from about \$100 million to about \$50 million — in the last decade.

DNR employees and constituent and conservation groups were exasperated.

Photograph courtesy of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources



DNR Director Marc Miller

They had been shut out of the decision-making process by the Blagojevich administration. Personnel cuts left the agency at 1,313 employees — about half strength from only a decade prior. The Conservation Congress, a constituent group, was disbanded. Employees were under a gag order and couldn't even speak to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal agency in charge of allocating the state's share of money collected from a tax on sporting goods and equipment.

So when Quinn pledged that the department was on the way back, the cheers drowned out the words that followed. Employees were in the mood to celebrate, even with the state facing an uncertain economic future and a budget deficit approaching \$12 billion.

For Miller, one of the first jobs — right after getting parks back in business — was to help rebuild relationships with conservation and recreation groups while keeping

the newfound employee morale high.

Asked on February 5, the day Quinn appointed him to the job, about putting those relationships back together, Miller shrugged and said, "I don't want to be overly simplistic, but you can start by talking to them."

Miller came to the Natural Resources directorship by way of then-Lt. Gov. Quinn's office, where he was an environmental policy adviser for five years. Miller says Quinn appealed to his sense of service when he first hired him, telling him he could make a greater difference working in state government.

The new agency head is a native of Mattoon and graduated from Eastern Illinois University in 1991 with a bachelor's degree in political science. He earned his master's degree at the University of Illinois at Springfield in 1996 in environmental administration. He worked for the Prairie Rivers Network from 1999 to 2004.

Just before naming Miller to the job, Quinn fired former state Rep. Kurt Granberg, who was appointed after Blagojevich was arrested on federal corruption charges in December. Granberg resigned his House seat before the January vote to impeach Blagojevich.

During Blagojevich's tenure, three people ran the agency, including Joel Brunsvoold, a retired state legislator; Sam Flood, who was acting director but never was promoted to the directorship; and Granberg, who served only a few weeks before being replaced by Miller.



The Illinois Department of Natural Resources headquarters in Springfield

Quinn said he wanted a “natural resources professional” to run the agency. Granberg had promoted the establishment of a golf trail in southern Illinois, something constituents said was a commercial venture that was outside DNR’s mission.

Miller says he hunts, fishes and enjoys being outdoors, a qualification DNR constituents craved — so much so that a group of outdoor writers begged him to trade in his business suit for camouflage and get a new column photo taken for DNR’s *Outdoor Illinois* magazine.

On the wall in his office is a mounted 7-pound largemouth bass he caught when he was 11 years old. Miller says the catch helped spark his interest in the outdoors — and drained away every spare cent he had for lures and tackle. He says he doesn’t want to forget that feeling and wants DNR to create similar opportunities for kids.

Miller says Quinn was adamant from the start that the parks be reopened immediately: “The directive from the governor was, ‘Get those parks opened ASAP.’”

Money was available from a bill that swept more than \$200 million from special state funds. Ironically, some of the funds tapped by that legislation were restricted DNR funds tied to federal matching grants. The General Assembly had to vote to put slightly more than \$9 million back or risk losing \$16 million in federal grants.

To get the parks back online, employees had to be called back to work and union negotiations completed.

“Everything turned up green light,” Miller says. “And we had a tremendous day with the governor on February 26. All the tools were there, and the funding was there.”

To keep the momentum going, Miller embarked on a series of town hall meet-

ings to reconnect with constituent groups. Miller guesses he’s talked to 125 different groups at more than two dozen meetings. About 90 people showed up at one meeting, he says.

“It’s been greatly appreciated,” he says. “Reopening the lines of communication has been very well-received.”

Tom Clay, executive director of the Illinois Audubon Society, says for the past six years, conservation groups would meet to discuss DNR’s budget and strategize ways to maximize grants and other funding opportunities.

“We were out there trying to advocate for the department, and they were absent from the table. That’s a huge change in a short amount of time — to be working again with the agency to accomplish its mission.”

Illinois Audubon hosted one of the meetings with Miller at its new Springfield headquarters building.

“I mean [communication has] improved nearly 100 percent,” says Jerry Beverlin, a retired DNR administrator and representative of the United Bowhunters of Illinois. “Communication has always been good at the staff level, but we had little or none with the administrative level. This has been a dramatic change.”

“For the most part they want to be helpful in rebuilding the agency,” Miller says of conservation groups that have gathered to meet with him. “They are concerned about where the agency has been, and they want to make it better.”

Beverlin says groups need to understand that even with improved communication, not everyone will support every policy. “Every decision that is made has some sort of attachment to individual groups,” he says. “Some of those will be positive, and some of them won’t.”

Miller says he stays in touch with Quinn, although not as often as when he

was lieutenant governor.

“The amount of workload that he carries necessitates that chiefs of staff and deputy chiefs manage some of the day-to-day issues,” Miller says. “Regular contact has continued, although it is less frequent than at the lieutenant governor’s office, where I spoke to him every day.”

Still, he says, “either one of us is just a phone call away.”

Reopening closed state historic sites was more difficult than the parks because funding already had been vetoed. It took a supplemental funding bill to get historic sites such as Springfield’s Dana-Thomas House open to the public again.

Miller says gaining an understanding of how DNR’s budget is crafted has been challenging because he took the directorship when the process was at its midpoint. Work on the following fiscal year’s budget normally begins in the fall.

The state budget still wasn’t completed at press time, and Miller was pressing for some license and fee increases to help DNR rebuild and replace “critical” staff lost to early retirements and attrition.

Miller says it is up to the agency to let lawmakers and the public know that natural resources protection, outdoor recreation and the operation of state parks are not “luxury items” in the state budget but an important economic engine for Illinois.

“We must help with the economic recovery,” Miller says, ticking off numbers such as \$3.2 billion in economic impact of fishing, hunting and wildlife watching. Park visitors total 44 million, generating \$790 million in economic activity and 8,500 jobs, which DNR says is a conservative estimate.

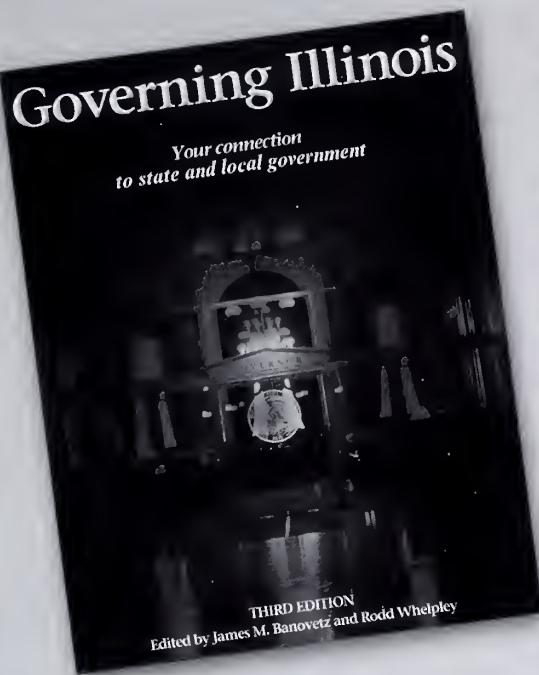
“We are at the very beginning of the rebuilding of the department,” says Beverlin. “But without the dollars and the staff to carry through some of these thoughts, that’s all they are.”

Still, even with a pessimistic economic and budgetary outlook, Miller says his agency remains upbeat about the future.

“You can see the physical change in the body language and smiles,” he says. “The governor’s visit was a clear signal that we are on the way back.” □

Chris Young is Outdoors editor for the Springfield-based State Journal-Register.

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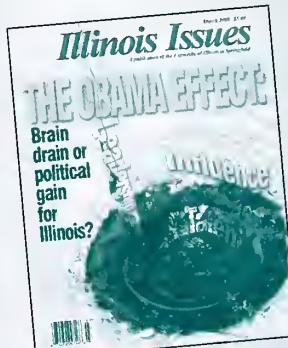
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Aim for a better government

Andy Shaw is the new executive director of the Chicago-based watchdog group the Better Government Association. The Chicago resident replaces **Jay Stewart**, who stepped down in January to join Gov. Pat Quinn's staff.

Shaw was a reporter for WLS-TV for 26 years before he resigned in January. He had previously worked with WMAQ-TV, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and City News Bureau.

"I know what good government looks like; I know what bad government looks like — only now I can speak out as an advocate, a partisan, a citizen," he says.

He adds that he hopes to garner new

funding for the association so it can expand in Internet communications and investigative reporting, as well as monitor more governing boards.

"It's more critical than ever that money go only to the goods and services people need and not to perpetuating the friends and cronies of politicians," Shaw says.

The association exposes concerns about government workings at the city, county and state levels. During Stewart's tenure, for instance, the association sued former Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration for failing to comply with requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

Court docket

Isaac Carothers, the 29th Ward Chicago alderman, was indicted in late May on federal fraud and bribery charges along with Chicago developer **Calvin Boender**. The 11-count indictment involves a plan to develop a 50-acre former railyard and industrial site on the city's west side into a residential and commercial neighborhood.

Federal prosecutors allege that in 2004, Boender paid \$40,000 for improvements to Carothers' home in exchange for the alderman's support of zoning changes required for the development. Boender also allegedly presented Carothers with meals and tickets to sporting events, including skybox seats to a 2005 Chicago White Sox playoff game.

According to published reports, Carothers has been cooperating with federal investigators for more than a year. He reportedly wore a wire to record conversations between city officials and developers.

The sale of Galewood Yards — the largest undeveloped tract within the city limits — netted a profit of \$6 million, with \$3 million going to Boender personally, according to prosecutors. The development includes 187 residential buildings, a union training center and a 14-screen theater.

Carothers was elected to the city council in 1999. He is chairman of the City Council Police and Fire Committee and a member of the panels on committees, rules and ethics, finance and zoning.

Revamped pension board

Scandals involving the Illinois Teachers' Retirement System board under former Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration led to a new state law ordering the replacement of existing appointed members (see *Illinois Issues*, May, page 9). The new law, signed by Gov. Pat Quinn in April, also requires all board members to conform to state ethics laws.

Quinn recently appointed six new members. They are:

- **Matthew Berns** of Highland Park, an attorney at Chicago-based Hu-Friedy Manufacturing.
- **Michael Busby** of Kenilworth, a former vice president of Watson Wyatt Worldwide, a global human resource pension consulting firm.
- **Livia Kiser** of Downers Grove, an attorney

ney with Latham Watkins in Chicago.

- **Sidney Marder** of Springfield, an engineer and former member of the Illinois Pollution Control Board and former director of energy and executive director of the Illinois Regulatory Group, an affiliate of the State Chamber of Commerce that specializes in environmental matters.
- **Janice Reedus** of Indian Head Park, vice president of administration and finance at Fenwick High School in Oak Park.
- **Sonia Walwyn** of Naperville, vice president of the Midwest region for the Wayne, Pa.-based Keane Organization.

The appointments are pending Senate approval. TRS oversees benefits to about 355,500 school employees outside the city of Chicago.

Illinois EPA director goes global to combat greenhouse emissions



Doug Scott

Doug Scott, director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, was elected chair of the Climate Registry board of directors last month. The Climate Registry measures, reports and sets standards for greenhouse gas emissions reporting in the United States. The board meets twice a year.

Scott will be responsible for governing the nine-member executive committee during the months that the board does not meet. His responsibilities primarily include overseeing the development and growth of the organization. He will collaborate with officials from around the world, as the organization is made up of 41 U.S. states, Washington, D.C., 12 Canadian provinces and territories, six Mexican states and four sovereign nations.

He replaces former chair Gina McCarthy, commissioner of Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection. McCarthy is now serving as President Barack Obama's assistant administrator of air and radiation for the U.S. EPA.

As director of the Illinois EPA since 2005, Scott is responsible for helping to reduce emissions from coal-fired power plants, while examining alternate energy and fuel sources such as wind power in the Midwest.

People on the move

Roger Walker Jr., former director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, was appointed to a six-year term on the state's Prisoner Review Board, which considers cases of parole and, among other functions, reviews recommendations for clemency. Appointed to the board by Gov. Pat Quinn, Walker receives an \$85,886 salary.

He was appointed corrections director by former Gov. Rod Blagojevich in 2003. Quinn replaced him this spring with a former Ohio official, **Michael Randle** (see *Illinois Issues*, June, page 35). Walker, a Decatur native, was the state's first elected African-American sheriff.

OBIT

Terrence Barnich

The former chairman of the Illinois Commerce Commission also was a chief counsel to then-Gov. Jim Thompson. He died in Iraq May 25. He was 56.

According to the U.S. State Department, he had been working as deputy director for the department's Iraq Transition Assistance Office at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad since January 2007. On Memorial Day, the vehicle he was riding in drove over an improvised explosive device, killing him, a U.S. civilian working for the Defense Department and one U.S. military employee, a State Department official says.

"We are losing a guy who had two great attributes," says Thompson. "He had a passion for adventure, and he had a real belief in public service.

"He always believed in the ultimate goodness of public service. He would dive right in," whether it was serving Illinois government, managing former State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka's political campaign in 2006, contemplating his own political future or serving his country in Iraq.

"It had always been my hope that he would come back to Illinois and be a candidate for public office because

From regulatory panel to worldwide project

Robert Lieberman left the Illinois Commerce Commission in late May to join the Regulatory Assistance Project, which works with public utility regulators in 45 states and Washington, D.C., as well as Brazil, China, Egypt, India and Namibia. He will provide research and analysis on electricity utility policy and regulation to public officials, according to the Illinois Commerce Commission.

He joined the commission in 2005. He previously was chief executive officer of the Chicago-based Center for Neighborhood Technology, a think tank to help urban areas develop ecological and economic strategies for sustainable growth.

he's exactly the type of young Republican we need," Thompson adds.

According to a resolution adopted by the General Assembly, Barnich was well-liked for his "camaraderie, quick wit, self-effacing and irreverent sense of humor, and ability to bring an element of fun to even the most serious and stressful situation."

He gained a high public profile in the 1980s while assisting Thompson's administration in an investigation of an alleged rapist. The use of DNA evidence eventually led to the exoneration of the individual and a commutation of the sentence.

Thompson appointed Barnich to chair the Illinois Commerce Commission in 1989. He served until 1992.

While serving in Iraq, Barnich was taking leave from his private sector job as founder and chief executive officer of a Chicago-based consulting firm, New Paradigm Resources Group, that researches emerging communications technologies.

The Chicago native earned his bachelor's degree from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and his law degree from Fordham University in New York City.

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Explanation of financial collapse reaches beyond housing market

The cover of your most recent issue intrigued my curiosity with the provocative title of "A spectacular collapse" (see *Illinois Issues*, June, page 16). What disappointment! Mr. Vock has not a clue.

Daniel C. Vock informs us that "the story of the collapse takes many twists and turns, with fateful swings through Wall Street and Washington, D.C., ... but the main reason for the recession is that too many people bought houses they couldn't afford." Both conclusions are probably accurate as far as they go, but they do not even come close to any foundational explanation.

Nowhere does the article mention the rot at the top and that everything that has happened economically in the last 30 years was intentional and planned, including the "spectacular collapse." The whole idea of "deregulation," started by [President Jimmy] Carter and put into high gear by [President Ronald] Reagan, can be held responsible. In addition, the godfather of the thuggery was economist Milton Friedman and his fellow travelers in the world of capitalist fairy tales.

For more than 30 years, people have been assaulted by: (1) union busting, (2) stagnant wages, (3) savings and loan robberies, (4) banking robbers, (5) creative thieves on Wall Street, (6) junk bonds, (7) Alan Greenspan, (8) deregulation to benefit corporations and assault consumers, (9) political bribery in a scope never seen by history, (10) theft of the public commons (oil, land, honesty, elections, airwaves, pensions, historical experience), (11) concentration of power and money to enhance what was already concentrated, (12) greed, (13) capitalist imperialism and (14) a lot more.

Mr. Vock's milk-toast breakfast could use a good shot of whiskey. I am still looking for leadership that has a clue. We The People will only give them so much time.

Richard Worthen
Alton

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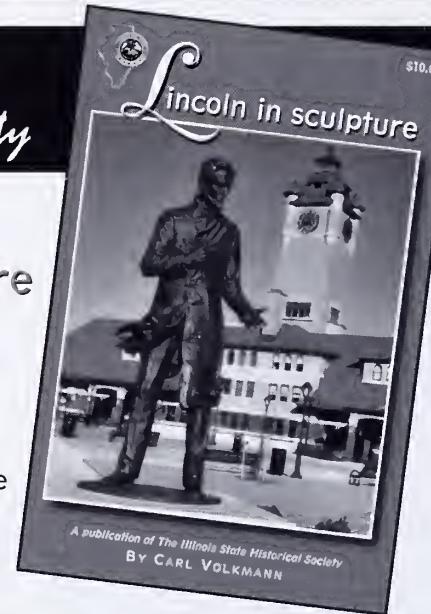
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Charles N. Wheeler III



Lawmakers used almost surgical precision to address problems linked to former governor

by Charles N. Wheeler III

Is the glass surprisingly near full or virtually bone-dry empty?

That's the underlying question for those who would rate the General Assembly's response to the calls for fundamental changes in how Illinois government works in the wake of the corruption scandal involving former Gov. Rod Blagojevich.

Some reformers and editorial boards — joined by partisan Republicans — were quick to give the Democratic-controlled legislature failing marks for not adopting all the recommendations from Gov. Pat Quinn's blue-ribbon reform panel and other change advocates.

In particular, the reform crowd complained that the state's first-ever proposal to limit some campaign contributions was more loophole than law. GOP leaders grumbled that nothing was done to rein in the power of the majority Democrats and their leadership. Hyper-ventilating editorial writers deplored that lawmakers shelved a plan to allow voters to fire the governor and other elected officials.

Despite such lamentations, a closer examination shows that lawmakers addressed with almost surgical precision the problems linked to the former governor, especially the pay-to-play allegations that led to Blagojevich's arrest and subsequent indictment.

Consider:

- A federal jury convicted Blagojevich fundraiser Antoin "Tony" Rezko of fraud

for his role in kickback and extortion schemes involving decisions made by state boards overseeing pension investments and hospital construction. Another insider and board member, Stuart Levine, pleaded guilty to similar charges and was a key witness against Rezko.

In response, the legislature swept Blagojevich appointees from the boards, mandated new ethics and economic disclosure requirements for members and beefed up conflict of interest provisions. Quinn signed the measure, **Senate Bill 364**, in April.

- An uncanny coincidence permeated Blagojevich's six-year tenure — big campaign donors got even bigger state contracts, sometimes under questionable circumstances.

Lawmakers last year approved, over Blagojevich's veto, a measure that bans businesses with contracts worth more than \$50,000 from contributing to statewide officials who award the contracts.

- Ironically, the federal wiretaps released when Blagojevich was arrested in December detailed his frantic efforts last fall to rake in big bucks before the ban took effect on January 1.

- This spring, the legislature approved far-reaching changes in how the state buys goods and services, intended to insulate such procurement decisions from political influence. The package reflects ideas from Quinn's panel, including inde-

pendent procurement officers and monitors charged with making sure that state purchasing decisions are above-board. No-bid and emergency purchases — two loopholes used to direct contracts to contributors and other political insiders — would be much more difficult to execute.

The measure, **SB 51**, also would restore internal auditors to state agencies, in place of the centrally controlled operation Blagojevich installed. The change should help agency heads avoid the kind of statutory violations that later show up in auditor general reports.

- The state's internal watchdogs received reports of some Blagojevich wrongdoing but by law could not share verified information with the public. Indeed, the House impeachment committee needed an attorney general's opinion to pry loose a report by the executive inspector general documenting widespread disregard for veterans preference laws and other hiring requirements as the governor's patronage operation handed out jobs.

Lawmakers rewrote the statute to allow inspectors general to release publicly reports of investigations uncovering corruption. The legislation, **SB 54**, also strengthens whistle-blower protection, tightens revolving door prohibitions on state employees going to work for companies with whom they've had official dealings and increases lobbyist registration fees.

• The Blagojevich administration was notorious for restricting access to public information to control tightly its public relations image, going so far as to defy attorney general opinions and judicial requests for documents.

One of Quinn's first acts as governor was to order state agencies to comply fully with the state's Freedom of Information Act, and lawmakers then sent him far-reaching revisions in the open records law to strengthen the public's access to documents. The measure, **SB 189**, would shorten a public body's response time to an information request and would narrow the often-abused personal privacy exemption.

Other significant changes would let the attorney general make binding decisions on the release of records a public body wants to withhold, impose stiff fines for noncompliance and require public bodies to pay legal fees for citizens suing successfully for access.

Also approved was legislation, **House Bill 35**, creating an Illinois Transparency

and Accountability Portal, a Web site with online databases providing detailed information about state workers, contracts, spending, professional licensing and business tax breaks.

Some of those who see the glass as almost empty grudgingly acknowledge the therapeutic qualities of the foregoing list but argue that lawmakers' rejection of the campaign limits they sought in favor of a watered-down bill overshadows all else.

One might argue, though, that the most significant loophole in any scheme limiting campaign contributions cannot be closed by any legislative body but would require the U.S. Supreme Court to reverse its 1976 ruling exempting independent expenditures from caps.

Others lambaste the legislature for refusing to give local prosecutors greater eavesdropping and wiretapping powers. Anyone wondering why that idea might give someone pause need only consult the *Chicago Tribune's* comprehensive series on prosecutorial misconduct of a few years ago.

Overall, the legislative reaction to the reform suggestions followed the pattern predicted here a couple of months ago. Changes affecting executive branch operations were embraced; those that would upset the legislative status quo were not.

In so choosing, did Democratic leaders and their majorities sustain a culture of corruption? Or was that the rational approach, focusing on eradicating the opportunities for clearly documented illicit activities while ignoring certain aspects of the legislative process that some might not like but are hardly corrupt?

Instead of bemoaning what didn't happen, naysayers might want to look again and see a glass that's got more in it than anyone would have believed possible this time last year. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

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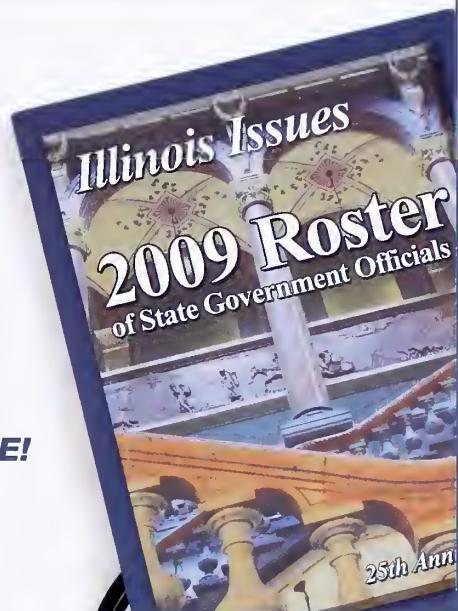
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A screenshot of a web browser displaying the 'Illinois Issues blog' website. The header reads 'Illinois Issues blog' and 'The official blog of Illinois Issues magazine, published by the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Springfield'. The main post is titled 'Tax talk of how to protect low-income workers' by Jamey Dunn, dated Tuesday, April 14, 2009. The post discusses advocacy groups calling for a state income tax increase. Below the post is a sidebar for 'Illinois Issues magazine' featuring the 'This month's cover' of the magazine.

Sean Hobin, spokesman for Voices for Illinois Children, said that the tax credit would target lower income families more effectively than Quinn's proposed increase in the personal tax exemption, which he wants to raise from \$2,000 to

